

**17 SHOPS CAUGHT THIS YEAR FOR BREACHING FOOD REGULATIONS
Minority errant shopkeepers need to clean up their act**

Last year, 13 out of 42 or 31% of retail outlets surveyed by the Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE) were found selling expired food products. In April 2005, CASE conducted a second survey, this time involving 60 major and small-to-medium-sized retail outlets island-wide. The survey showed 17 out of the 60 retail outlets or 28.3% breaching the Food Regulations – either by not removing all expired food products or having food products with improper food labels on their shelves.

2. The retailers surveyed were from five sampling zones — central, north, south, east and west and comprised of supermarkets and franchised convenience stores, as well as mini-marts, provisions shops, and sundry shops. On average, 30-50 items were sampled at each of the small-to-medium retailers and 100-200 items at each supermarket. The food products randomly sampled were in accordance with the list of pre-packed foods that require date-marking under the Food Regulations. (Please refer to [Annex 1](#) for the list.)

3. Of the 60 outlets found contravening the Food Regulations, 17 outlets were found having expired food products. An estimated 900 samples were checked at the 17 outlets, and 3% or 27 samples, mostly biscuits, chips, chocolates and sweets were found to have been past their use-by or sell-by dates. Specifically, the expired food products were found in major retail outlets, mini marts and provision shops.

4. Some outlets sold food products with improper food labels:
- o two outlets stocked food products with expiry date-marks written in foreign languages.
 - o one outlet sold candy chocolates without any expiry date-marks and
 - o one outlet is suspected of misleading consumers by concealing the original expiry date-marks with new labels

5. The cases relating to expired food products have been referred to the National Environment Agency (NEA) for their follow-up action. On public health grounds, NEA takes a serious view of anyone caught selling expired foodstuffs and conducts their own regular checks on retailers across Singapore – CASE understands the NEA has inspected 367 shops between Sept 2004 and Apr 2005. In relation to the findings of this survey, NEA will check to ensure the errant retailers are not selling other expired food products and prepare the necessary documentation to assist the Agri-food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA) in prosecution of the case under their Sale of Food Act. As for the cases relating to improper labeling, these have been referred to the AVA for enforcement action.

6. Under the AVA's Sale of Food Act, the sale of pre-packed food with an expired date-mark and/or an incorrect food label is an offence. Any person who contravenes or fails to comply with the regulations shall be liable to a fine not

exceeding \$1,000, and in the case of a second and/or subsequent conviction/s to a fine not exceeding \$2,000. (Please see [Annex 2](#) for more details on the AVA's regulations on expiry date-mark and labeling.)

Next Steps Ahead

7. CASE will be working with the authorities to train additional volunteers for our new Mystery Shopper Programme (MSP). The MSP will start from July 2005. It will involve some 30-50 voluntary surveyors being trained in each session, and has been organized to strengthen CASE's consumer watchdog role, to help ensure good quality hygienic food is being sold to consumers. Specifically, the AVA will teach our volunteers what is required on food labels i.e the expiry date, ingredient listing, net weight and name of local manufacturer or the importer and the country of origin. CASE staff and volunteers will also be taught how to read food labels better and to differentiate between expired date marks and labeling irregularities. With the necessary tools and know-how gained from this training, CASE surveyors will be better equipped for their role and to work hand-in-hand with the NEA and AVA in relevant future projects.

8. CASE will also be working with the authorities to continue to keep consumers well informed of the steps they need to take when buying food products so that they can make better choices for themselves. To ensure their own safety, consumers are advised to check the expiry dates and food labels on products they purchase. Consumers who have inadvertently purchased expired or improperly labeled food products should quickly inform the retailer concerned. This will help prevent the sale of such products to other buyers. They are also advised:

- o to keep CASE informed of such outlets so that we may include them in our future surveys
- o to report offending retailers to NEA should they come across the sale of expired food products or to AVA on other improper food labeling problems.

Consumers who buy goods close to the expiry date should use the product before the use-by or sell-by date.

Advice to Retailers

10. CASE urges businesses to cease selling expired and improperly labeled products. If CASE finds evidence of retailers who are repeat offenders and who do not seem to be mindful of their responsibility in ensuring that the food-products at their outlets are not expired and properly labelled, we will not hesitate to publicly blacklist these errant vendors to serve as a deterrent to others and to warn them not to engage in such unacceptable practices. Retailers should bear the following in mind:

- i. Under the Food Regulations, only those food products listed in Annex 2 are required to have an expiry date-mark. However, if a date-mark is placed on the product, then retailers have to ensure that the product sold is not passed its expiry date. In addition, importers and distributors of any pre-packed food product have to ensure that the date mark and food label are in compliance with the Food Regulations.
- ii. All retailers are advised to take responsibility in checking and monitoring the expiry dates of their food products. They have to do so seriously and regularly as this concerns the health of those who purchase

and consume their products. By placing an expiry date mark on a product, the manufacturer is making a clear statement that the quality of the product is not guaranteed if consumed or used after the expiry date.

iii. Retailers should promptly return outdated or improperly labeled stocks of food products to the manufacturers/suppliers/distributors, or dispose of them in an appropriate manner.

11. CASE will continue to conduct food expiry date-mark and food labeling surveys on a regular basis. We shall also assist affected consumers in seeking redress. The public can contact us at CASE hotline 64631811.

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