

## Seven Customs execs probed for melamine-tainted milk importation

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At least seven Customs officials and seven private individuals face charges for allegedly importing melamine-tainted milk.

The Ombudsman recommended a preventive suspension of the seven Customs officials while the investigation of the case against them is being done.

According to a press statement on the Ombudsman's website, its Field Investigation Office (FIO) charged the following Customs officials:

- \* Customs Operations Officer V Emmanuel Reyes;
- \* Customs Operations Officer V Akmad Noo;
- \* Customs Operations Officer III Dante Crisostomo;
- \* Customs Operations Officer III Ruben de Rama;
- \* Customs Operations Officer III Paulita dela Cruz;
- \* Assistant Customs Operations Officer Taha Cali, and
- \* Clerk III Felicissimo Javier.

On Tuesday, the Ombudsman said it is recommending the suspension of the Customs officials, who allegedly violated the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act or Republic Act (RA) No. 3019 for allowing the entry of the tainted milk.

The seven private individuals who were also charged were:

- \* Ederlinda Cochanco;
- \* Ellen Cochanco;
- \* Lucio Cochanco Jr.;
- \* Eliz Cochangco;
- \* Larry Conchangco, Board of Directors of Flyace Corporation;
- \* Neil Ruzol, broker, and
- \* Ulysses Asuncion, representative, both of IMPEX PRO Logistics Corporation.

The 14 face charges for unlawful importation and commission of statutory offenses of a Customs officer, and violation of RA No. 3019.

GMANews.TV tried to reach the Bureau of Customs office but it could not be contacted as of posting time.

The seven Customs officials also face administrative charges for: Gross Neglect of Duty, Grave Misconduct, Inefficiency and Incompetence in the performance of official duties and Conduct Prejudicial to the Best Interest of the Service.

In a six-page Complaint, the FIO alleged that the Customs officers "failed to verify the correspondence of the Certificate of Product Registration with the Sales Invoice and Bill of Lading for Jolly Cow High Calcium Low Fat Milk prior to its release."

The Bureau of Customs records showed that Flyace Corp. reportedly imported Jolly Cow Slender High Calcium Low Fat Milk without the required Certificate of Product Registration from the Bureau of Food and Drugs (BFAD).

This violated Administrative Order No. 37 and Bureau Circular 2007-06 from the Department of Health that "any person desiring to import or export food and food products shall file an application for registration for each and every food items to be imported or exported."

"It was found that Flyace presented a Certificate of Product Registration for Jolly Cow Pure Fresh Milk, a product with a label different from Jolly Cow Slender High Calcium Low Fat Milk. In addition, the Import Entry and Internal Revenue Declaration described the goods as Jolly UHT Pure Milk, not Jolly Cow Slender High Calcium Low Fat Milk," the Ombudsman FIO said.

The FIO added the "accuracy, completeness and authenticity of the import entries for Jolly Cow (Slender) High Calcium Low Fat Milk should have been ascertained by the document processor, examiner, principal customs examiner and principal customs appraiser" based on the import procedures of the BoC.

Having failed to do so, the officers allegedly "caused the entry into the country of Jolly Cow Slender High Calcium Low Fat Milk without requiring the Certificate of Product Registration," the FIO added.

The Ombudsman cited the results of a BFAD inspection that found the milk brand to have traces of melamine, a substance found hazardous to human health.

A BFAD inventory conducted on October 8, 2008 also showed that 27,912 packs of Jolly Cow Slender High Calcium Low Fat Milk with traces of melamine have been distributed to the market. –with Sophie Dedace, VVP, GMANews.TV