

## Ombudsman suspends 3 Customs execs over 'melamine milk' importation

By Tetch Torres  
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MANILA, Philippines—

The Office of the Ombudsman on Monday preventively suspended for six months without pay three officials of the Bureau of Customs for their participation in the alleged unlawful importation of melamine-laced milk into the country. Preventively suspended include Customs Operations Officers Emmanuel Reyes, Akmad Noor, and Dante Crisostomo.

In a nine-page order, Ombudsman Ma. Merceditas N. Gutierrez said "the continued stay of the said respondents in office during pendency of the administrative adjudication can affect the disposition of this case considering their positions in the Bureau of Customs."

Crisostomo was the examiner tasked to conduct documentary and physical examination of the goods for proper collection of customs duties and taxes. The findings of Crisostomo went for review to Noor, the principal Customs examiner. Their findings on the other hand were reviewed by Reyes, the principal Customs appraiser.

The three are currently undergoing preliminary investigation before the Office of the Ombudsman, following the criminal and administrative charges filed against them by the Field Investigation Office.

The officials are facing 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, as well as criminal charges for unlawful importation under Section 3601 and commission of statutory offenses of a Customs officer under Section 3604 in relation to Section 1403 of the Tariff and Customs Code of the Philippines, and Violation of Section 3(e) of RA 3019 (The Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act).

The three allegedly failed to verify the Certificate of Product Registration presented by the Flyace Corporation against the Sales Invoice and Bill of Lading for Jolly Cow Slender High Calcium Low Fat Milk which was found to have traces of melamine, a substance hazardous to human health.

Investigation showed that Flyace presented a Certificate of Product Registration for Jolly Cow Pure Fresh Milk and not Jolly Cow Slender High Calcium Low Fat Milk. The label of the duly licensed Jolly Cow Pure Fresh Milk is different from the Jolly Cow Slender High Calcium Low Fat Milk.

Based on inventory conducted by the Bureau of Food and Drugs in October 2008, a total of 411 cases of 250-milliliter pack and 1,504 cases of one-liter pack of Jolly Cow Slender High Calcium Low Fat Milk with traces of melamine had been distributed in the market. Gutierrez told Customs Commissioner Angelito Alvarez to implement the order of preventive suspension and to promptly submit a compliance report.

< <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/nation/view/20100920-293317/Ombudsman-suspends-3-Customs-execs-over-melamine-milk-importation>>