RADIOACTIVE CONTAMINATION OF IMPORTED FOOD ITEMS TO SRI LANKA AFTER THE CHERNOBYL NUCLEAR ACCIDENT

J.K. Dharmasiri, R. Hewamanna, D.G. Sunil Shantha, C.S. Abeygunawardena, U.D. Ratnayake and K.G. Dharmawardena
Radioisotope Centre, University of Colombo

The Chernobyl nuclear accident in the USSR took place on 26th April, 1986. Many countries in Europe received radioactive contamination due to the release of radio isotopes like I-131, Sr-90, Cs-137 and Cs-134 food materials harvested or produced after the accident started comming to Sri Lanka in September 1986. The short half life of I-131 (8.1 days) prevented detecting any significant levels in the food after September 1986. The radioactive contamination of food materials imported to Sri Lanka were examined by gamma spectrometry (HASL Manual, 1972) at the Radioisotope Centre since September 1986. Results of samples tested during the period September 1986 - September 1987 are presented here. The radioactive contaminents found were only Cs-137 and Cs-134, having half lives of 30.1 and 2.1 years respectively. Out of 1089 samples examined during the period upto March 1987, 22 samples (2 %) contained these radio nuclides in excess of 20 Bq/Kg and the contamination was always found in milk and milk based products. This 2 % invariably contained the short lived isotope Cs-134 indicating recent contamination. The food items examined after March 1987 did not contain these radionuclides above 10 Bq/Kg.

References:

'Radiochemical determination of caesium-137', HASL-300 Procedures Manual, pp-E-Cs-01-01-12, Health and Safety Laboratory, New York, 1972