



JRC develops new testing methods for contaminated sports drinks from Taiwan

Brussels, 29 July 2011 - The European Commission's Joint Research Centre has developed three new methods to detect an illegal clouding agent which can be found in sports drinks imported from Taiwan.

In late May, the Taiwanese authorities informed the European Commission that significant amounts of phthalates were illegally added to certain categories of sports drinks. These chemicals are believed to affect reproductive performance and fertility, and have been linked to developmental problems with children.

Under a request from the Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Consumers, the JRC developed and validated three new testing methods that allow the substance to be rapidly and accurately detected. The methods are freely available on the JRC website and are intended to facilitate the work of laboratories in the EU and world-wide involved in the testing of suspected products. Testing laboratories are invited to submit their feedback regarding the performance of the methods to the JRC, which will analyse the findings and improve the methods, if necessary.

The Taiwanese Food and Drug Administration has published the names of 879 products of more than 300 producers that contained high amounts of phthalates. More than 200 products from 34 producers were exported to 22 countries. These include some EU Member States, in particular Germany and the UK, where some products were withdrawn from the market.

What are phthalates?

Normally, producers of sports drinks, jelly and fruit pulps use a palm-oil based product to obtain a cloudy appearance, but in the Taiwanese incident, this was largely replaced by the two cheaper substances: bis-(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (commonly abbreviated DEHP), and - in one case - di-iso-nonyl phthalate (DINP). DEHP and DINP are commonly used as plasticizers in many plastic products. These substances, however, are prohibited in the production of food, and their use in plastic toys and childcare products is restricted in the EU.

References

The three analytical methods on the JRC website
<http://irmm.jrc.ec.europa.eu/activities/phthalates>

List of products that contained high amounts of phthalates, published by the Taiwanese Food and Drug Administration
http://www.fda.gov.tw/eng/news_list.aspx?time=1&classifysn=453

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