



**Belize Agricultural Health Authority and
Ministry of Health Advise Consumers that Milk and Milk Products
Originating from China May be Contaminated with Melamine**

Belmopan, September 24, 2008

The Belize Agricultural Health Authority (BAHA) and the Ministry of Health (MOH) hereby informs the public of an alert issued by The International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva advising consumers of contaminated milk and milk products, including infant formula, originating from China.

China's Ministry of Health reported over the weekend of September 21st 2008 that nearly 40,000 children have sought medical treatment related to the consumption of **melamine-contaminated powdered infant formula**. Three deaths have been confirmed as being related to contamination of infant formula. One is under further investigation.

Melamine has been detected in milk and milk products produced by **Sanlu Company Limited** (part owned by New Zealand dairy company Fonterra Co-operative Group Limited), **Mengniu Dairy Group Co.**, **Yili Industrial Co.** and **Shanghai-based Bright Dairy**. So far, contamination has also been found in liquid milk, frozen yogurt dessert and in coffee drink. All these products were most probably manufactured using ingredients made from melamine contaminated milk.

Since the intentional addition of melamine to raw milk seems to have been on-going for several months, there is potential for some of the contaminated milk and milk products to have been distributed to other markets through informal channels. From the time the alert has been reported through the INFOSAN network, Belize, through the Belize Agricultural Health Authority, has checked its import databases to investigate if there have been any imports of milk and dairy products from the identified suspected source(s). **To date, there has been no imports of such products into Belize.**

Melamine was already involved in contamination of animal feed from China: In 2007 the USA reported an outbreak event in pets from tainted pet food imported from China, leading to the death of a relatively large number of domestic cats and dogs. Melamine was implicated as the main contaminant in this event.

Melamine (also known as cyanuramide) is a molecule that has a number of industrial uses, such as in the manufacture of plastics, including dishware. Melamine is a name used both for the molecule and for the plastic made from it. In this alert, all references are to the molecule, which is not approved for use in human food by Codex Alimentarius, the international organisation for food safety, or any national government. Melamine, which is high in nitrogen, has been added to ingredients used in animal feeds to give the appearance of increased protein levels. Unapproved substances added to food are considered adulterants under Belize law and most food safety legislation.

BAHA and the Ministry of Health advise both the general public and especially health professionals to investigate signs and symptoms involving kidney function complications in babies fed with powdered infant formula. Kidney stones in babies are rare and could be an indication that contaminated powdered formula is on the local market. Melamine leads to crystal formation in the kidney that can cause a complete inability to pass urine - anuria - and renal failure as the kidneys becomes damaged and, if not treated, eventual death. Other clinical manifestations include unexplained crying, especially when urinating, blood in the urine and possible vomiting.

The Belize Agricultural Health Authority will continue to inspect all importations of milk and milk products to verify its origin. The Ministry of Health will be inspecting the supermarkets and retail outlets to verify that no such tainted milk and milk products have penetrated the market. Regular updates will be provided as more information becomes available.

Consumers who have questions should contact BAHA's Food Safety Services at 224-4794 or 223-4457 or email foodsafety@btl.net; Ministry of Health at 822-2325 or email dhs moh@yahoo.com or the District Public Inspectors at phone numbers: 223-1213, 322-2072, 422-2677, 522-2184, 722-2142, 822-2263, 824-2066, 226-2555.