

'Excessive heavy metals' in 1M'sia chilli sauce
Malaysiakini.com
November 15 ,2011
by Nigel Aw

A laboratory test on Kedai Rakyat 1Malaysia (KR1M) chilli sauce has revealed mercury and lead levels that breach the ceiling allowed by the Food Regulations 1985.

In a draft comparative product research report, the Malaysian Association of Standards Users (Standards Users) says, 3.64ppm of lead and 0.08ppm of mercury were found in the product.

KR1M chili sauceThe permitted levels are 2ppm of lead and 0.05ppm of mercury for chilli sauce.

The report compared the product to three other brands - Tesco Value, Life and Lingham - all of which were within permitted levels and were, in fact, significantly lower than the threshold.

Testing for the products was conducted by Unipeq Sdn Bhd, a company accredited by the Department of Standards under the Laboratory Accreditation Scheme.

Standards Users chief executive DN Ratna said her organisation has conducted such research for more than three years and decided to include the 1Malaysia products, since consumers are being encouraged to buy these.

The products tested were obtained from grocery shops and supermarkets in the Klang Valley, between August and September.

Commenting on the results, Ratna urged the Health Ministry to immediately halt the sale of the 1Malaysia chilli sauce.

"This concerns heavy metals, (so the ministry) should hold (back) sales of the product until it verifies (our findings) with its own test. (It can then) take further action," she said.

"The effect of heavy metal is poisoning. If somebody consumes the product over time, (the heavy metals) will accumulate in their hair, tissues and other parts of the body... If the person's health is vulnerable, then the (effects) will be manifested more quickly."

According to the report, excess mercury can damage the central nervous system and the endocrine system, leading to potential kidney damage.

Lead intake can lead to vomiting and diarrhoea from short term exposure, while "ongoing exposure, to even very small amounts of lead, can be harmful, especially to infants and young children".

Contacted this afternoon, Mydin Mohamed Holdings Bhd managing director Ameer Ali Mydin said he is currently in a meeting and will revert with comments after looking into details of the allegation.

The wholesaler operates the network of low-end stores set up since June to help people to cope with the rising cost of living.

Tracing sources of contamination

Ratna said the group was still studying how the sauce had come to contain such high levels of heavy metal.

"There could be two sources of contamination. One is from the soil and the other is from pesticides... contamination from other vegetables can happen during transfer," she said.

The test further found the 1Malaysia chilli sauce to have breached food regulations for total soluble solids, recording only 23.9 percent of the total content instead of the required minimum of 25 percent.

In contrast, Tesco Value, Life and Lingham recorded 26.9 percent, 50.4 percent, and 66.5 percent respectively.

"This means the actual soluble solid contributed by the content of chilli and sugar is less, they've added thickeners to make it look like sauce," Ratna explained.

Checks on tomato sauce

The report also detailed a comparative study of three tomato sauce brands - 1Malaysia, Tesco Value, and Muslim Best.

Again, the 1Malaysia product failed the soluble solid test, recording only 23.8 percent instead of the 25 percent minimum requirement.

As for heavy metals, the report says: "Although within limits, the 1Malaysia tomato sauce has the highest content of heavy metals and lowest content of total soluble solids."

In the report, the group calls on the Health Ministry to trace the source of heavy metals and ensure that the food supply chain is controlled so that food for human consumption is safe, from farm to table.

Special care is required during primary production, where pesticides and cross-contamination of raw materials are more likely to take place, according to the report.

The report by Standards Users, an affiliate of the Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations (Fomca), is the first revelation of contraventions in 1Malaysia products by a consumer NGO, following a series of claims by DAP's Petaling Jaya Utara MP Tony Pua.

Last week, Pua had charged that savings from KR1M products were exaggerated and that some products even contravened the Food Act 1983 and Food Regulations 1985.

Some of the more controversial products highlighted were the 1Malaysia Oyster Sauce, 1Malaysia Fresh Milk and 1Malaysia Growing Up Milk.

However, Mydin has rebutted most of Pua's allegations, although it conceded that the complaint about the oyster sauce is valid and said rectification is under way.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd
<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/181482>