

To: Lead Officers for Food

Cc: SFELC
REHIS
CoLSA

11 October 2005

Reference ENF/S/05/020

Dear Colleague

“Zam Zam” Water – misdescription and potential hazard to health

The Zam Zam well, which is located within the precinct of the Holy Mosque in Makha, Saudi Arabia, is sacred to Muslims and it is their belief that this water has healing properties.

Recently, many brands of bottled water claiming to be the genuine Zam Zam water have been placed on the market, particularly in those areas which have a significant Muslim population.

The Food Standards Agency has recently received complaints from Muslim Organisations that the water is misdescribed and is being marketed fraudulently. Following this complaint, the Agency contacted the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in London, for clarification. We have been formally informed that the Zam Zam water, which is extracted from a single well, is only available to pilgrims and can neither be exported nor sold within or outside Saudi Arabia, on a commercial basis.

To our knowledge, three Local authorities have sampled different brands of the water and in all cases have found that the nitrate levels far exceed the limits contained in the Natural Mineral Water, Spring Water and Bottled Drinking Water Regulations 1999 (SI 1999/1540) as amended by SSI 2003/139. In addition, a brand formally sampled by London Borough of Westminster was found to contain almost three times the permitted arsenic limit of 10 µg/l. This level is considered by the Agency to present a risk to health, as arsenic is known genotoxic carcinogen. Details of this particular product are as follows:



Product Name: Natural Zam Zam Water

Brand name: Zam Zam

Description of Packaging: Plastic bottle

Pack sizes: 0.5 and 0.25L

Date Codes: "Product Date"9/20/2004 ("Valid for 2 years")
(USA style date coding)

Country of Origin [as stated]: Saudi Arabia

UK Importer: Amazon Communicate Ltd, 151 Edgware Road, London W2
2HR

Whilst other brands of Zam Zam water have to date not been found with elevated arsenic levels, their compositional requirements do not conform with bottled water regulations - it is an offence under the regulations to bottle or sell spring water or drinking water that contains any substance listed in Schedule 3 at a level which exceeds the maximum limit specified in relation to that substance in the Schedule to the regulations.

With regard to the above brand, the wholesaler/retailer concerned has stated that his premises was the sole outlet and measures have been taken to prevent further sale of the product from that outlet. However, we would like to make local authorities aware of this issue and ask you to be aware of these products, particularly during the month of Ramadan (October), when demand for this water is likely to increase.

The Agency has issued a RASFF notification relating to the Westminster findings and will be working with the Commission and the Saudi government to trace exporters. However, we would be interested to hear from any authorities who identify Zam Zam water on sale in their area and would draw your attention to the misleading nature of labelling as well as the history of compositional failings in certain products. Given these problems and the concerns expressed to the Agency by Muslim representatives, local authorities are requested to take



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appropriate enforcement action, including sampling, with a view to removing suspect products from sale and also to obtain any relevant information to help trace suppliers.

For your reference, a few images of some packaged products are in Annex A. However, there are several other brands being sold on the market.

I shall be grateful if you could convey all relevant information regarding sampling and/or enforcement actions to me (Tel: 01224 285175, E-mail: jacqui.bunyan@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk). If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Jacqui Bunyan
Senior Enforcement Advisor
Food Standards Agency Scotland



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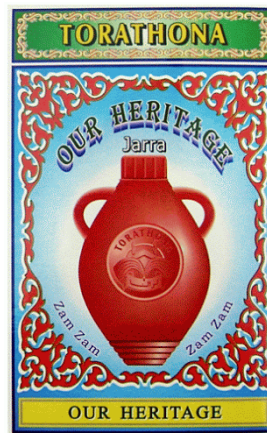
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Annex A - Images of some packaged “Zam Zam” products





“Natural Zam Zam Water” brand formally sampled by



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London Borough of Westminster and found to contain almost three times the permitted arsenic limit of 10 µg/l.



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