

To: District Council Chief EHO's  
Group Chief EHO's  
NIFLG Members  
CIEH NI Centre  
LACORS

Dear Colleagues,

Ref: ENF/NI/08/042

## **SALES OF WATER LABELLED AS “ZAM ZAM” WATER**

### **For information**

We are aware that water labelled as “Zam Zam” water continues to be found on the UK market for sale to Muslims. Analysis of samples of this water on sale in the UK in previous years has identified elevated levels of arsenic and nitrate, which are a potential risk to health.

This is a reminder that Ramadan will begin in early September and consumption of Zam Zam water by the Muslim community will be at its highest. This water, which is sacred to Muslims, comes from a specific source in Saudi Arabia and cannot legally be exported from that country for commercial sale. Therefore, other than personal imports, any product found in the UK would have an uncertain origin and could pose a safety risk. You may find the following advice helpful when dealing with water found on sale labelled as “Zam Zam” helpful:

- *Water labelled as “Zam Zam” found on sale* - you may wish to have regard to Article 4 of the Food Safety (NI) Order 1991 on the presumption that food is intended for human consumption. If water is or is presumed to be for food use, then it may be sampled and analysed. Particular concerns with this water are



arsenic and nitrate. If you have suspicion of non-compliance with the relevant food safety requirements under the Natural Mineral Water, Spring Water and Bottled Drinking Water Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007 (SR 2007/No.420), then the water should be detained. If water is found not to comply with the relevant food safety requirements for bottled water, then appropriate enforcement action should be taken.

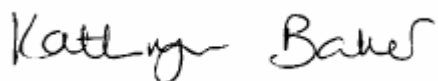
- *Water labelled as “Zam Zam” found on sale but is claimed not to be for human consumption or is labelled ‘for external use only’ – the UK Islamic Shari’a Council has advised that Zam Zam water is **always** intended for human consumption. Follow the guidance given in the bullet point above.*

We have also written to district councils with port health functions (Ref: NIP/611/08/50) advising them to take appropriate measures on consignments labelled as “Zam Zam” water received at ports.

If you need further information on this issue, then please do not hesitate to contact me on 02890 417736 or email: [kathryn.baker@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:kathryn.baker@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk)

If a consumer raises any health concerns, then please refer them to the attached Agency advice.

Yours faithfully,



Kathryn Baker  
Local Authority Unit  
Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland

August 2008

[www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk)



## **FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY (FSA) ADVICE ON BOTTLED WATER LABELLED AS ZAM ZAM WATER SOLD IN THE UK**

Over the past few years, the Food Standards Agency has become aware of bottled water of uncertain origin labelled as Zam Zam being sold in the UK. On testing, some of this water has been found to contain **arsenic** and **nitrate** at levels above those permitted by bottled water legislation. Elevated levels of these substances are a potential risk to health. Although we are aware of claims on some “Zam Zam” water that it is not intended for human consumption and so is not covered by the legislation, the UK Islamic Shari’a Council has confirmed that Zam Zam water is always intended for drinking purposes. We are therefore advising consumers to exercise caution if they have any doubts as to the water’s origin.

### **Consumer health issues**

#### *Arsenic*

Inorganic arsenic is associated with an increased risk of lung, skin and bladder cancer. An independent committee of experts has recommended that exposure to inorganic arsenic should be as low as possible. Based on the levels found previously, in practice occasional drinking of small amounts of water, found on sale and labelled as “Zam Zam”, would be a very low risk to health.

#### *Nitrate*

High levels of nitrate can affect infants by reducing the ability of blood to transport oxygen around their bodies. So whilst occasional consumption of water labelled as “Zam Zam” by adults and older children should not pose any particular health worries, infants shouldn’t drink water labelled as “Zam Zam” on sale in the UK.