



To: Directors of Public Protection

27 August 2008

Reference: ENF/W/08/052

Dear Director

SALES OF WATER LABELLED AS “ZAM ZAM” WATER

For information

The Agency is 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 when dealing with any water found on sale labelled as “Zam Zam” helpful:

- *Water labelled as “Zam Zam” found on sale* - you should have regard to Section 3 of the Food Safety Act 1990 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 (Wales) Regulations 2007 (SI No. 3165 (W.276), 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 local authorities with port health responsibilities (Ref: IDF/W/08/029) advising them to take appropriate measures on consignments labelled as “Zam Zam” water received at ports.

Advice from the Agency is attached, however If you need further information on this issue, then please contact Adrian Preece on 029 2067 8909 or by email at adrian.preece@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. D. Bassett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'B'.

Mike Bassett
Head of Imported Food Branch

FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY (FSA) ADVICE ON PERSONAL IMPORTS OF BOTTLED WATER LABELLED AS ZAM ZAM WATER

Over the past few years, the Food Standards Agency has become aware of Zam Zam water of uncertain origin being sold on 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 of personal imports 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 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.