



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部食物及衛生局  
Food and Health Bureau, Government Secretariat  
The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region  
The People's Republic of China

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Clerk to Panel on Health Services  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
Legislative Council Complex  
1 Legislative Council Road  
Central, Hong Kong  
(Attn : Ms Maisie Lam)

Dear Ms Lam,

**Request to Discuss the Safety of Personal Care Products**

Thank you for your letter dated 1 March 2016 to the Secretary for Food and Health, requesting for a written reply on the safety of personal care products. In consultation with the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, Customs and Excise Department (C&ED), Environmental Protection Department (EPD) and Department of Health (DH), our consolidated reply is as follows:

**General Consumer Goods**

At present, general consumer goods, including personal care products such as body powder, are subject to the regulation of the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance (Cap. 456). All consumer goods manufactured, supplied or imported into Hong Kong shall comply with the general safety requirement specified in the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance. In determining whether the consumer goods comply with the general safety requirement, all of the circumstances, including reasonable safety standards published by a standards institute or similar body, should be considered.

The C&ED is the primary department responsible for enforcing the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance. In addition to investigating complaints from the public and media as well as cases referred from other Government departments/institutions, the C&ED will also monitor the safety of various consumer products supplied on the market, take the initiative to analyse international product recall notifications and product test reports released by professional organisations, and accord priority to sampling of consumer products with higher risks for safety tests according to their risk profile.

On conducting investigations or taking samples for testing, the C&ED will collect samples of the consumer goods concerned and carry out the tests according to the appropriate international safety standards. If necessary, the C&ED will seek professional advice from the DH to assess the risks posed by the products which fail to comply with the relevant standards.

### **Carcinogenicity of talc**

Talc is a mineral composed mainly of magnesium, silicon and oxygen. Some talc may contain asbestos in its natural form. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) of the World Health Organization (WHO) has pointed out that talc containing asbestos should be regarded as carcinogenic to humans (Group 1), which is the same group for asbestos. According to the American Cancer Society, all talcum products used in the United States after the 1970s should be asbestos-free. In Hong Kong, the EPD has banned the import and sale of the more hazardous amosite and crocidolite according to the Air Pollution Control Ordinance (Cap. 311) since 1996. It further amended the Air Pollution Control Ordinance in 2014, imposing a total ban on the import, transshipment, supply and use of all forms of asbestos and materials containing asbestos, except goods in transit and proprietary Chinese medicines registered under the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (Cap. 549).

According to the information provided by the DH, the IARC under the WHO has set up a working group to examine the carcinogenicity of asbestos-free talc and published a monograph in 2010. When assessing the carcinogenicity of asbestos-free talc, the working group considered the available studies on human beings, data from experimental animals and other information. Perineal use of asbestos-free talc is classified as "possibly carcinogenic to humans" (Group 2B) because there is inadequate evidence for its carcinogenicity to humans. Apart from perineal use, there is also inadequate evidence that inhaled asbestos-free talc is carcinogenic to humans, and evidence of its carcinogenicity to experimental animals is limited. Inhalation of asbestos-free talc is therefore regarded as "not classifiable" (Group 3).

**Follow-up actions on the incident in the United States**

On 23 and 24 February 2016, the media reported that a woman in the United States had died of ovarian cancer, of which a suspected cause was the use of body powder containing talc for over 35 years. Her family filed a lawsuit to the local court against the body powder manufacturer. The court ruled in favour of her family and compensation was awarded. Having noted the reports, the C&ED made an enquiry to the product agent in Hong Kong on 25 February 2016 about the content of the body powder supplied in Hong Kong. The agent replied that the products supplied contained talc but not asbestos and would pose no safety problem as they were in compliance with the international standards. A laboratory report showing the absence of asbestos in the products was also produced by the agent as evidence.

The international safety standards currently applicable to body powder impose no restrictions on the talc content. However, it is stipulated that if the body powder contains talc and is for use by children under three years old, it should be affixed with a warning label reading "Keep the powder away from children's nose and mouth". The C&ED staff purchased body powder of five different brands (including the brand involved in the incident) from the local market and found that all five products were affixed with the warning label as required. The labels also meet the bilingual warning requirement under the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance.

Thank you for your concern about the matter.

Yours sincerely,



(Miss Fiona Chau)

for Secretary for Food and Health

c.c.

Secretary for Commerce & Economic Development	(Attn : Ms Jacko Tsang)
Commissioner of Customs & Excise	(Attn : Ms Chik Shun-kwan)
Director of Environmental Protection	(Attn : Mr Mok Wai-chuen)
Director of Health	(Attn : Dr Tina Chan)