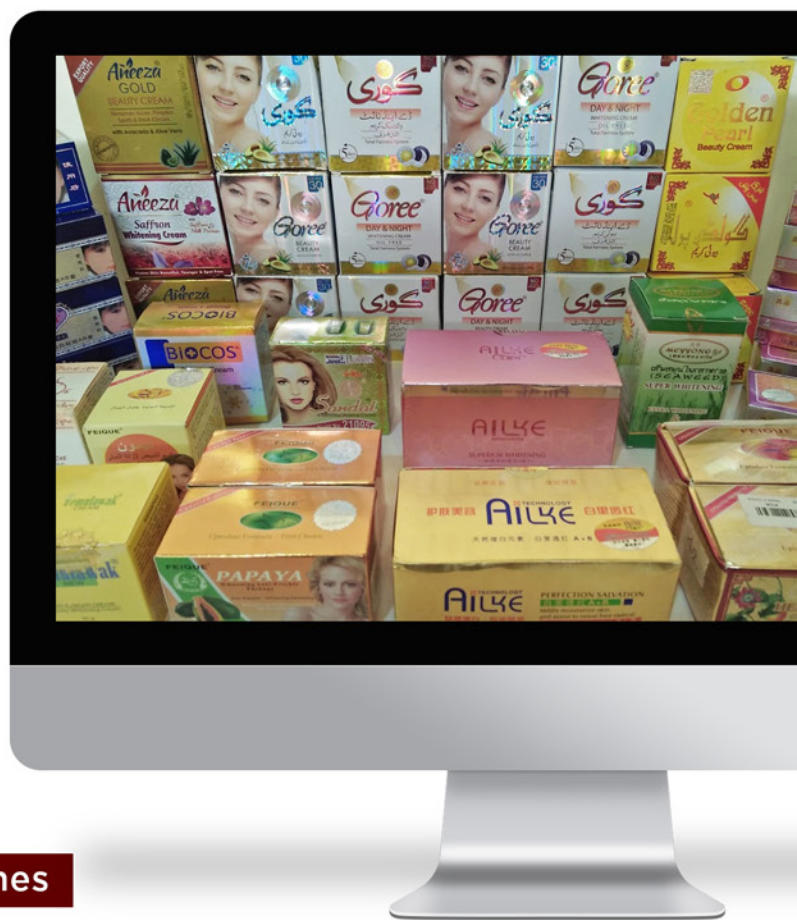




TOXIC EXPOSÉ

Online Trade of Mercury-Containing
Skin Whitening Cosmetics in the Philippines

ECOWASTE COALITION, PHILIPPINES, MARCH 2021



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78-A Masigla Extension, Barangay Central, 1100 Quezon City, Philippines

Phone: +632-82944807 ; E-Mail: info@ecowastecoalition.org

Website: www.ecowastecoalition.org, ecowastecoalition.blogspot.com

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This investigation on the sale of mercury-containing skin bleaching, lightening or whitening cosmetics in online shopping platforms and social media sites was conducted by the EcoWaste Coalition to support the implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury that the government of the Philippines ratified on June 2, 2020. The treaty, named after the Japanese city of Minamata that suffered decades-long mercury poisoning, seeks to protect human health and the environment from mercury emissions and releases. The convention, among other provisions, sets a global phase-out target by 2020 of certain mercury-added products such as cosmetics, including skin lightening creams and soaps, with mercury content above 1 part per million (ppm).

The study brought to light the unethical and unlawful use of online shopping and social media sites to promote and sell skin whitening cosmetics with undisclosed mercury content. Of the 65 samples procured in this study and subsequently screened for mercury, a highly toxic chemical not allowed in cosmetic product formulations, 40 were found to contain mercury above the trace amount limit of 1 ppm; of which 38 had mercury above 1,000 ppm; 25 contained mercury above 5,000 ppm; 19 were laden with mercury above 15,000 ppm; and 5 were loaded with mercury above 25,000 ppm. None of these samples are duly notified or registered with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The sale of mercury-added skin whitening cosmetics via online shopping platforms and social media sites is an affront to Republic Act No. 9711, or the FDA Act of 2009, and Republic Act No. 7394, or the Consumer Act of the Philippines. These laws prohibit and penalize the sale of cosmetics without FDA authorization or those

those that contain harmful or toxic substances.

Based on the results of the investigation, the EcoWaste Coalition has put together several recommendations directed to the government, online shopping platforms and social media sites, cosmetics industry and the consumers. Among these recommendations were:

- **For the government to strengthen laws and regulations that will regulate and monitor online trade and protect consumers against hazardous products such as mercury-containing cosmetics, and for the authorities to ensure the environmentally sound management of mercury-added products and their wastes.**
- **For e-commerce platforms and social media sites to ban the sale of adulterated, counterfeit and unauthorized cosmetics and for them to keep an eye on and take down non-compliant product ads.**
- **For the cosmetics industry to move away from white-centric concepts and ideals of beauty, and promote diversity in beauty instead, including the inherent beauty of one's natural skin color.**
- **For consumers to shun chemical whiteners, embrace their natural skin color with pride and stand up to color-based bias, prejudice and discrimination, and for those who prefer to lighten their skin tone to reject unauthorized cosmetics that may contain mercury, hydroquinone and other harmful substances.**

This study was undertaken as part of the Project Toxic-Free for Human Rights and Sustainable Development in the Philippines financed by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC). Project Toxic-Free PH, as it is also called, seeks to raise public awareness on hazards in chemicals, products and wastes, promote precautionary action and informed choice, advocate for policies on the sound management of priority chemicals throughout their life cycles, and safeguard policy gains to protect public health and the environment, among other objectives.

With technical assistance from the International Pollutants Elimination Network (IPEN), the EcoWaste Coalition completed the study to:

- Generate data on the mercury content of skin whitening cosmetics advertised and sold using digital channels such as the Internet.
- Inform consumers about the dangers of consuming mercury-containing skin lightening cosmetics using the data generated.
- Push for corrective policies and actions that will eliminate the online sale of mercury-contaminated skin lightening products.
- Promote the implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, as well as the National Action Plan for the Phase-Out of Mercury-Added Products and the Management of Associated Mercury-Containing Wastes, or the NAP.
- Draw critical awareness on chemical whiteners and foster acceptance and pride in natural skin color.

The study exclusively focused on mercury and excluded other toxic metals or melanin-suppressive substances that may also be present in the analysed samples.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACD	ASEAN Cosmetic Directive
ACSB	ASEAN Cosmetic Scientific Body
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
DENR	Department of Environment and Natural Resources
FDA	Food and Drug Administration (Philippines)
IPEN	International Pollutants Elimination Network
NAP	National Action Plan for the Phase-Out of Mercury-Added Products and the Management of Associated Mercury-Containing Wastes
ppm	Part per million
SSNC	Swedish Society for Nature Conservation
UNEP	UN Environment/ United Nations Environment Programme
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UP	University of the Philippines
WHO	World Health Organization
XRF	X-Ray Fluorescence

THE SKIN WHITENING PHENOMENON IN THE PHILIPPINES



An advertisement showing a woman undergoing skin whitening. SHUTTERSTOCK

A paper by anthropologist Dr. Soledad Natalia M. Dalisay of the University of the Philippines (UP), which resulted from an Innovation Grant for the Chemical Youth project funded by the Social Science and Global Health Program of the University of Amsterdam, “found that light skin, which was associated with beauty, was preferred because it helps expand the social capital, symbolic capital, and economic capital of those who possessed it.”¹

“References to light skin as ‘malinis’ (clean) give the impression that dark skin is ‘marumi’ (dirty). This association has bearing on the value attributed to light skin and those who possess it. Therefore, those who aspire to have light skin use whiteners to ‘remove’ the dark, supposedly dirty skin tone,”² noted Dalisay’s paper titled “Sensing the World: Social Sensorium in the Chemical Use of Selected Youth in the Philippines.”

The seeming obsession for a fairer skin tone might have been influenced by the country’s colonial history having been ruled by Spain for 333 years and by the United States of America for 48 years. Wittingly or otherwise, many Filipinos seem to aspire to have the whiteness of their former Caucasian masters.

As pointed out in the said UP study, “the preference for light skin may be construed as a product of the Filipinos’ colonial past, wherein biosocial racial markers like the colonizers’ aquiline noses and fair skin have been idealized, whereas the features of the local

population have been demeaned.”³ It noted, however, “that even among cultural groups in the Philippine pre-colonial past, light skin had been given importance”⁴ such as the case of the *binukot* among the people in Central Panay, Philippines.

“Today, such a deeply entrenched craving for lighter skin tone is further enhanced by the beauty standards set by the cosmetics, media and entertainment industries, which tend to inculcate the notion that a whiter skin is desirable and can be a ticket to a successful relationship, life and career. ”

Another paper by Francine Singson of the Virginia Commonwealth University delving on *“Colonialism’s Role in the Success of the Filipino Skin Whitening Industry”*⁵ ascribed such a success *“to the damaged psychological state of the native people brought on by American colonial rule,”*⁶ explaining that *“this can be attributed to the mistreatment of the native population, and the subsequent development of internalized oppression, colonial mentality, and an ingrained preference for white skin.”*⁷ Singson noted that *“although colonialism plays a significant role in the success of the skin whitening industry, it is possible that many other factors come into play.”*⁸

Today, such a deeply entrenched craving for lighter skin tone is further enhanced by the beauty standards set by the cosmetics, media and entertainment industries, which tend to inculcate the notion that a whiter skin is desirable and can be a ticket to a successful relationship, life and career.

As Dalisay noted, aspirations to have lighter skin like the mestiza beauty product endorsers in various advertisements were articulated by the study informants. *“Light skin was associated with the potential to land better-paying jobs and romantic partners, especially for the women,”*⁹ the study said.

A survey conducted by the EcoWaste Coalition among its members in September 2020 cited the following as top reasons as to why skin whitening products are widely sold and consumed in the Philippines:

- **White skin is beautiful**
- **White skin is attractive**
- **Because it can be seen on TV, movies and commercials**
- **This is due to colonial mentality**
- **Because it is rampantly sold in the market**
- **White skin is clean to look at**
- **To look like an actress or beauty queen**
- **Personal choice.**
- **Looks younger when the skin is white.**
- **White skin symbolizes a better status in life.**
- **White skin gives more confidence to oneself.**
- **Because it is the trend.**

Mercury is a toxic substance considered by the World Health Organization (WHO) as one of the “ten chemicals of major public health concern.”¹⁰ Studies have indicated that exposure to mercury – even in low doses – may have toxic effects on the nervous, digestive, immune, respiratory and urinary systems, may damage the skin and may pose “a threat to the development of the child in utero and early in life.”¹¹

Because of its unique chemical characteristics, mercury has been used in a range of consumer, household and medical products over the years. In skin whitening cosmetics, mercury inhibits the production of melanin pigment that can yield a “fairer” skin tone. Aside from the promise of a brighter skin complexion, many of these facial cosmetics are often marketed as magic potion to remove aging spots, blemishes, freckles, scars and speckles, treat acne, and even out the skin (see Table 1).

MERCURY IN SKIN WHITENING COSMETICS

Misleadingly promoted as a panacea to skin woes, these cosmetics have gained popularity among Africans and Asians, especially women, increasing consumer demand for such bleaching or whitening products and increasing their adverse effects to human health and the environment.

PRODUCT SAMPLES	PRODUCT CLAIMS AS INDICATED ON PACKAGING
Ailke Boost Luster Superior Whitening	“Highlight the most beautiful skin,” “make skin plump, tender as the newly born baby’s,” “make skin even, crystal white and glowing from within”
Aneeza Saffron Whitening Cream	“Makes skin beautiful, younger & spot free”
Biocos Beauty Cream	“Skin whitening magic,” “free from sub-standard and harmful substances
Feique Herbal Extract Whitening Anti-Freckle Set	“Key to perfect skin”
Golden Pearl Beauty Cream	“Turns your skin to white,” “makes you so much gorgeous looking that you won’t believe,” “the only cream in the world which in a very short span of time makes you look beautiful”
Goree Day & Night Beauty Cream	“Get up to 2 tones fairer,” “the best skin lightener with optimal skin penetrating base”
Jiaoli Miraculous Cream	“Skin will become clean, rosy and healthy; quickly and thoroughly remove pigment and whiten the skin”
S’Zitang 10-Day Whitening & Spot Day Night Set	“True effective product for you to renew your youth and recollect your self-confidence”

TABLE 1. Examples of product claims



GlutaMax previously came under fire for allegedly advocating for colorism in their advertisements. SHUTTERSTOCK

Sadly, not many consumers are aware that mercury is melanotoxic, or toxic to pigment cells, and that this substance is easily absorbed by the skin causing harmful dermatologic effects. Users of mercury-containing skin whitening cosmetics may experience skin discoloration, rashes and scarring and reduced skin’s resistance to bacterial and fungal infections, while repeated applications can cause damage to the brain, the nervous system and the kidneys.¹²

Even non-users can be exposed to mercury in skin whitening cosmetics. The California Department of Public Health has warned that “creams that contain mercury can be dangerous for anyone living in the home where they are used,” explaining that “the mercury spreads from the hands of anyone using the cream to other things they touch (and) then gets into the air and anyone in the home can breathe it in.”¹³

Mercury in skin whitening cosmetics also contaminates the ecosystems. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), “when products containing mercury are discarded into the general waste stream, they often end up in the environment – in waterways, wetlands, roadside litter, landfills or open dumps, where they may be burned. The mercury they contain is ultimately released into the air, water, and soil.”¹⁴

As explained by IPEN, “when mercury enters the aquatic environment, it can be transformed by microorganisms into a more toxic form, methylmercury. In this form, mercury enters the food chain and accumulates and biomagnifies in aquatic organisms including fish and shellfish, and also birds, mammals and people who eat them.”¹⁵

The Minamata Convention on Mercury, which entered into force on 16 August 2017, seeks “to protect human health and the environment from anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds,”¹⁶ including releases of mercury in products at various points in the product’s lifecycle. Article IV of the treaty stipulates the phase-out of certain mercury-added products by 2020, including cosmetics such as skin lightening products with mercury above 1 ppm and with the exception of mascara and other eye area cosmetics.

Even before the mercury treaty was negotiated and became binding internationally, the FDA of the Philippines was already taking action against the unlawful sale of mercury-containing skin whitening products. Through successive advisories issued from 2010 to 2018, the FDA banned over 135 skin whitening products for containing mercury contaminant beyond the 1 ppm trace amount limit in accordance with the ASEAN Cosmetic Directive (ACD). Among those banned by the FDA were 80 brands of non-compliant skin lightening products discovered and publicized by the EcoWaste Coalition through its steadfast market surveillance.

Despite being illegal to import, distribute and sell, these unregistered products from overseas – from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Pakistan – are sold over the counter or under the table in some Chinese drug stores, beauty and herbal product stores, and general merchandise stores offering cheap imported goods.

The growth of e-commerce and the ease of selling products online provided manufacturers and enterprising individuals with a dynamic arena to promote, market and sell all sorts of personal care and cosmetic products, including a variety of skin bleaching products catering to the consumer demand for stuff that can lighten and prettify the skin.

Migration has also played a role in the proliferation of mercury-containing skin lightening products in the market. Some enterprising Filipinos based in the Middle East, for instance, have acted as agents or dealers for unregistered mercury-laden cosmetics. In 2018, the



Mercury-containing Jiaoli Miraculous Cream, banned as early as 2010, promises to make the skin “clean, rosy, and healthy.” **ECOWASTE COALITION**

Bureau of Customs intercepted 12 “*balikbayan*”¹⁷ boxes of banned Goree Beauty Cream and Goree Day and Night Whitening Cream shipped from the United Arab Emirates. The illegal shipments¹⁸, worth PHP8 million, were falsely declared “*for personal use.*”

Using glutathione orally, topically or intravenously as a whitening and anti-aging agent has also become a worrying trend as many of these products have evaded the required product registration. A particular concern is the unsafe use of injectable products for skin lightening that has no approval from FDA.

According to the EcoWaste Coalition, some of the challenges in eliminating the illicit trade of mercury-containing cosmetics in the Philippines are as follows:

- Strong consumer demand for skin bleaching, lightening or whitening cosmetics to realize the desired flawless and fairer skin.
- Illegal traffic of adulterated and counterfeit cosmetics that are often sold in the informal market and in online stores.
- Unregulated advertising, promotion and sale of cosmetics, including banned and unauthorized products, via the Internet and other digital means by third-party dealers.
- Lack of consumer awareness against hazards posed by mercury-containing cosmetics to human health and the environment.

The country’s ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the adoption of the NAP for mercury-added products present opportunities for government regulators, in collaboration with other stakeholders, to act to eliminate both the supply and demand for mercury laden cosmetics to protect public health and the environment.

As noted by the WHO: “*To stop the manufacture, import and export of skin lightening products in line with the Minamata Convention, regulatory actions by governments are needed – including training of customs agents – as well as major media and advocacy campaign.*”¹⁹

“When products containing mercury are discarded into the general waste stream, they often end up in the environment - in waterways, wetlands roadside litter, landfills or open dumps, where they may be burned.

The mercury they contain is ultimately released into the air, water, and soil.”

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF MERCURY-CONTAINING SKIN WHITENING CREAMS

“Mercury-containing skin lightening products are hazardous to health,”²⁰ declared the WHO.

“The main adverse effect of the inorganic mercury contained in skin lightening soaps and creams is kidney damage,”²¹ said the WHO. Furthermore, “mercury in skin lightening products may also cause skin rashes, skin discoloration and scarring, as well as a reduction in the skin’s resistance to bacterial and fungal infections.”²² WHO lists “anxiety, depression or psychosis and peripheral neuropathy” as other effects of exposure to mercury in skin whitening products.²³

Mercury in skin whitening cosmetics also poses a threat to the environment, especially to marine life, as mercury from the product is eventually discharged through the wastewater. According to WHO, *“the mercury then enters the environment where it becomes methylated and enters the food-chain as the highly toxic methylmercury in fish,”²⁴ warning that “pregnant women who consume fish containing methylmercury transfer the mercury to their fetuses, which can later result in neurodevelopmental deficits in the children.”²⁵*

UNEP has stated that *“when products containing mercury are discarded into the general waste stream, the mercury pollutes the environment – in waterways, wetlands, and the air – and endangers people both locally and globally.”²⁶ And “even some of the mercury treated and disposed of under more controlled conditions, such as designated landfills, (mercury) may also be released to the environment over a longer period of time.”²⁷*

According to the UNEP’s “Guidance on Best Available Techniques and Best Environmental Practices (for) Waste Incineration Facilities,”²⁸ which are identified in the Minamata Convention as one of the major industrial sources of mercury emissions, *“consideration should also be given to approaches that prevent mercury entering waste which will be incinerated.”²⁹ As emphasized in the guidance document, the only relevant way to avoid mercury emissions from such facilities is to prevent mercury from entering the waste stream.*

“Mercury is volatilized in the incineration process and, therefore, specific action should be taken both before, during and after incineration to reduce these emissions. The only relevant primary techniques for preventing emissions of mercury into the air before incinerating are those that prevent or control, if possible, the inclusion of mercury in waste,”³⁰ the Guidance document pointed out.



Reguyal shows the after effects of using mercury-tainted cosmetic products and has since warned others of the dangers of using said products.

GRACE REGUYAL/FACEBOOK

GLOBAL, REGIONAL, AND NATIONAL REGULATIONS ON MERCURY IN SKIN WHITENING COSMETICS

The Minamata Convention on Mercury sets a 2020 deadline for the phase-out of listed mercury-added products. Among those targeted for global phase-out are cosmetics, including skin lightening creams and soaps with mercury above one part per million (ppm), but excluding mascara and other eye area cosmetics.

To help the country prepare for the implementation of the convention, which the Philippines signed in 2013, the government, with support from the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the Swiss Confederation, adopted in 2019 a National Action Plan for the Phase-Out of Mercury-Added Products and the Management of the Associated Mercury-Containing Wastes following a consultative process involving various agencies and groups, including the EcoWaste Coalition.

Under the ASEAN Guidelines on Limits of Contaminants for Cosmetics³¹, heavy metals such as mercury cannot be deliberately added to cosmetic products unless their presence is in trace amounts and is technically unavoidable in good manufacturing practice. The maximum trace amount limit set for mercury in cosmetics is one ppm.

In 2019, the ASEAN Cosmetic Scientific Body (ACSB) added “mercury and its compounds” to Annex II of the ACD, which provides for the list of substances that must not form part of the composition of cosmetic products. The ACSB further agreed to remove mercury-containing preservatives thiomersal and phenylmercuric salts from the ACD’s positive list.

“The manufacture, importation, selling or offering for sale of cosmetics products without FDA approval or found to contain harmful or toxic substances is in direct violation of Republic Act No. 9711, otherwise known as the FDA Act of 2009, and Republic Act No. 7394, otherwise known as the Consumer Act of the Philippines.”³²



MATERIALS & METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Popular online shopping sites have become a venue for the unlawful trade of unregistered cosmetics containing banned substances such as mercury. **ECOWASTE COALITION**

- The 65 samples were purchased from online sources from June 7 to July 10, 2020.
- **65** samples were ordered from third-party dealers at **Carousell (4), EBay (2), Lazada (19), Shopee (29) and Zalora (1)** online shopping sites.
- **2** samples were obtained from **Instagram** dealers.
- **9** samples were procured from **Facebook** dealers.
- Researchers also visited other online sites such as the BeautyMnl.com, Buyandsell.ph, Glotels.com, Picuki.com and Pwedepa.ph to look for products to purchase.
- According to the product labels and/or product inserts, the samples were manufactured in **China (30 samples), Pakistan (22), India (2), Japan (2), Korea (2), Taiwan (2), Thailand (2), Indonesia (1), and Malaysia (1)**. One sample provided no information about its country of origin or manufacture.

The EcoWaste Coalition prioritized products that were among those forbidden by the FDA for containing mercury and those being sold without the necessary market authorization.

The samples were then screened for total mercury content above one ppm, which is the national as well as the ASEAN-wide regulatory limit for mercury in cosmetics, using an Olympus Innov-X Delta handheld X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) spectrometer.

The XRF, a trouble-free “point and shoot” device, is able to rapidly analyze and quantify the heavy metal content of a sample without destroying it *“to monitor compliance with CPSIA, RoHS, WEE, EN71-3 and other regulations.”*⁵³

Since 2011, the EcoWaste Coalition has been using the XRF to screen cosmetics and other consumer products for heavy metals such as arsenic, cadmium, lead and mercury, and using the data generated to raise public awareness and to promote and/or uphold relevant chemical safety policies and regulations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1

61.5 % of the samples had mercury above the trace amount limit of 1 ppm and would be illegal to sell.


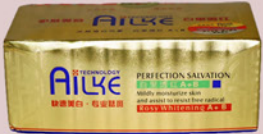




	PRODUCT	SOLD BY THIRD-PARTY DEALERS AT	MERCURY CONTENT (in ppm)	PHOTO
1	Ailke Boost Luster Superior Whitening	Lazada	41,200	
2	Ailke Perfection Salvation	Lazada	36,800	
3	Feique Herbal Extract Whitening Cream	Lazada	28,400	
4	Meyyong Seaweed Super Whitening Cream	Shopee	27,500	
5	Goree Day & Night Cream	Facebook	25,000	
6	Goree Beauty Cream	Instagram	24,500	

TABLE 2. Skin Whitening Creams with Highest Mercury Content (Per Brand)

	PRODUCT	SOLD BY THIRD-PARTY DEALERS AT	MERCURY CONTENT (in ppm)	PHOTO
7	Feique Papaya Whitening Anti-Freckle Package	Lazada	15,200	
8	Aneeza Saffron Whitening Cream	Facebook	14,300	
9	Golden Pearl Beauty Cream	Shopee	11,200	
10	Sandal Whitening Beauty Cream	Facebook	7,848	
11	Collagen Plus Vit E Day & Night Cream	Shopee	6,097	
12	Temulawak Day & Night Cream	Shopee	5,797	
13	Feique Lemon Whitening Natural Skin Care Freckle Remover	Lazada	3,991	
14	Biocos Beauty Cream	Facebook	3,969	

	PRODUCT	SOLD BY THIRD-PARTY DEALERS AT	MERCURY CONTENT (in ppm)	PHOTO
15	S'Zitang 10-Day Whitening & Spot Day & Night Set	Lazada	2,020	
16	Jiaoli Miraculous Cream	Lazada	1,996	
17	S'Zitang 7-Day Whitening & Spot Day & Night Set	Shopee	1,475	
18	Jiaoli 7-Day Specific Eliminating Freckle Cream	Shopee	1,319	
19	Aneeza Gold Beauty Cream	Facebook	766	



This "superior whitening" two-in-one facial cream screened with the highest mercury content among the samples analysed. **ECOWASTE COALITION**

Out of 65 samples, 40 (61.5%) had mercury above 1 ppm.

Out of 40 mercury-containing samples, 38 had mercury above 1,000 ppm, 25 had mercury above 5,000 ppm, 19 had mercury above 15,000 ppm, and 5 had mercury above 25,000 ppm (*please see Table II for samples with the highest mercury content per brand*).

20 of the mercury-containing samples were manufactured in Pakistan, 17 were from China, and one each from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand.

Despite FDA advisories prohibiting their sale, 10 brands are being sold online in clear defiance of the law (please see Table III).

	PRODUCT	SOLD BY THIRD-PARTY DEALERS AT	DATE BANNED
1	S'zitang 10-Day Whitening & Spot Day & Night Set	Carousell	May 2015
2	S'zitang 10-Day Whitening & Spot Day & Night Set	Carousell	May 2015
3	Goree Beauty Cream	Carousell	October 2017
4	Goree Beauty Cream	EBay	October 2017
5	Goree Day & Night Cream	EBay	October 2017
6	Goree Day & Night Cream	Facebook	October 2017
7	Goree Day & Night Cream	Facebook	October 2017
8	Goree Day & Night Cream	Facebook	October 2017
9	Goree Day & Night Cream	Facebook	October 2017
10	Goree Day & Night Cream	Instagram	October 2017
11	Goree Beauty Cream	Instagram	October 2017
12	Goree Beauty Cream	Lazada	October 2017
13	Feique Herbal Extract Whitening Cream	Lazada	September 2014
14	Feique Herbal Extract Whitening Cream	Lazada	September 2014
15	S'zitang 10-Day Whitening & Spot Day & Night Set	Lazada	June 2010/May 2015
16	S'zitang 10-Day Whitening & Spot Day & Night Set	Lazada	June 2010/May 2015
17	Jiaoli Miraculous Cream	Lazada	June 2010

TABLE 3. FDA-Banned Skin Whitening Creams Sold Online

	PRODUCT	SOLD BY THIRD-PARTY DEALERS AT	DATE BANNED
18	Ailke Perfect Salvation	Lazada	November 2012
19	Collagen Plus Vit E Day & Night Cream	Shopee	November 2017
20	Jiaoli 7-Day Specific Eliminating Freckle Cream	Shopee	June 2010/May 2015
21	Jiaoli 7-Day Specific Eliminating Freckle Cream	Shopee	June 2010/May 2015
22	Goree Beauty with Lycopene	Shopee	October 2017
23	Goree Day & Night Cream	Shopee	October 2017
24	Jiaoli 7-Day Skin Care Whitening Cream	Shopee	January 2010
25	S'zitang 7-Day Whitening & Spot Day & Night Set	Shopee	June 2010/May 2015
26	Golden Pearl Beauty Cream	Shopee	September 2014
27	Golden Pearl Beauty Cream	Shopee	September 2014
28	S'zitang 10-Day Whitening & Spot Day & Night Set	Shopee	June 2010/May 2015
29	Golden Pearl Beauty Cream	Shopee	September 2014
30	Temulawak Day and Night Cream	Shopee	March 2018



The nonstop importation, distribution and sale of mercury-added skin whitening cosmetics, including those already banned by health authorities, poses health and environmental hazards. **ECOWASTE COALITION**

	PRODUCT	SOLD BY THIRD-PARTY DEALERS AT	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
1	Ailke Boost Luster Superior Whitening	Lazada	China
2	Aneeza Gold Beauty Cream	Facebook	Pakistan
3	Aneeza Saffron Whitening Cream	Facebook	Pakistan
4	Biocos Beauty Cream	Facebook	Pakistan
5	Feique Lemon Whitening Natural Skin Care Freckle Remover	Lazada	China
6	Feique Papaya Whitening Anti-Freckle Package	Lazada	China
7	Meyyong Seaweed Super Whitening Cream	Shopee	Thailand
8	Sandal Whitening Beauty Cream	Facebook	Pakistan

TABLE 4. Mercury-Containing Cosmetics Sold Online that the FDA Should Ban

The EcoWaste Coalition's market investigation uncovered 8 brands of skin whitening products with excessive levels of mercury, which should be included in the FDA's list of banned products (*please see Table IV*).



Imported mercury-added products sold online that cosmetics regulators have yet to call out and ban. **ECOWASTE COALITION**

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The investigation conducted by the EcoWaste Coalition has revealed the open use of the Internet and other digital channels to promote and sell skin bleaching, lightening or whitening cosmetics loaded with elevated levels of mercury, a highly toxic chemical not permitted in cosmetic product formulations. Their sale in online shopping platforms and through Facebook and Instagram violates the provisions of Republic Act No. 9711, or the FDA Act of 2009, and Republic Act No. 7394, or the Consumer Act of the Philippines, which prohibit and penalize the sale of cosmetics without FDA authorization or those that contain harmful or toxic substances as per the ACD.

To stop the unlawful online trade of poison cosmetics laden with mercury and to assist in the implementation of the NAP in line with the 2020 phase-out deadline under the Minamata Convention on Mercury, the EcoWaste Coalition presents the following recommendations:

FOR THE GOVERNMENT

- Strengthen laws and regulations that will regulate and monitor online trade and ensure consumer protection against sale of hazardous products such as mercury-containing cosmetics.
- Conduct sustained law enforcement action, including going after violators, to rid the marketplace of mercury-containing skin whitening products.
- Ensure environmentally sound management of mercury-containing skin lightening cosmetics and other mercury-added products targeted for phase-out, including establishing safe storage facility and mercury waste treatment plant.

FOR ONLINE SHOPPING PLATFORMS, FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM

- Ban the sale of adulterated, counterfeit and unauthorized cosmetics and bar their dealers from using e-commerce platforms and social networking services.
- Take down ads for skin care products banned by health authorities for being contaminated with mercury and other harmful substances.
- Issue frequent notices reminding online dealers and shoppers on the hazards of selling and buying unauthorized cosmetics, including the risk of mercury poisoning.

FOR THE COSMETICS INDUSTRY

- Abide by the Philippine and ASEAN policies and regulations on mercury in cosmetics and strive to produce eco-friendly and non-toxic products.
- Move away from white-centric concepts and ideals of beauty, and promote diversity in beauty instead, including the inherent beauty of one's natural skin color.

FOR CONSUMERS

- Shun chemical whiteners, embrace your natural skin color with pride and stand up to color-based bias, prejudice, and discrimination.
- Cut the supply by not patronizing unauthorized skin lightening cosmetics that may contain mercury, hydroquinone and other harmful substances.

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- 17** Refers to a Filipino visiting or returning to the Philippines after a period of living in another country; balikbayan box is a huge corrugated box containing items sent by overseas Filipinos.
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