

Call for Taobao to remove products that endanger public and environmental health from sale

Dear Mr. Ma,

Greetings! This letter is written on behalf of 10 non-governmental environmental organizations: Green Beagle, Chongqing Two Rivers Volunteer Service Development Center, Dongguan Green Pearl River Environmental Protection Promotion Center, Shanghai Oasis Ecological Conservation and Communication Center, Green Anhui, Tianjin Green Youth Leadership Association, Green Longjiang, Jiangsu Friends of Green, Green Panjin, Green Camel Bell. We are writing this letter to you in the interest of protecting the public and the environment from heavy metal hazards

Mercury is a known harmful heavy metal. According to the World Health Organization, the inorganic mercury contained in some skin-lightening products can cause kidney damage, skin rashes, skin discoloration, scarring, anxiety, depression, psychosis, peripheral neuropathy, and reduction of resistance to infections. However, since mercury can inhibit melanin production in the skin, it is added to a number of skin-whitening and freckle-removing cosmetics. In order to protect the health of consumers, the "Hygienic Standards for Cosmetics (GB7916-87)" in China limits the mercury content of cosmetics to 1ppm (except for organic mercury preservatives in eye cosmetics, and hair dyes containing lead acetate). Other countries around the world have also prohibited the addition of mercury to cosmetics.

In March and April 2012, NGOs purchased 477 skin whitening and freckle-removing products on-line from Taobao and in the following cities: Beijing (Beijing Municipality), Chongqing (Sichuan Province), Dongguan (Guangdong Province), Harbin (Heilongjiang Province), Hefei (Anhui Province), Lanzhou, (Gansu Province), Nanjing (Jiangsu Province), Panjin (Liaoning Province), Shanghai (Shanghai Municipality), and Tianjin (Tianjin Municipality). The products were purchased from a variety of stores including supermarkets and whole-sale markets and products included skin-lightening creams, freckle removing products, and spot-removing creams. Mercury was measured using a portable X-ray fluorescence analyzer (XRF) which was calibrated using laboratory measurements of products. We found high levels of mercury in a significant number of products including some from Taobao (please see the attached document).

We tested 10 products from Taobao and found high levels of mercury exceeding regulatory limits in seven of them. One product also exceeded the regulatory limit for arsenic. These dangerous products sold throughout the country on Taobao, endangering the health of female consumers.

Our testing of products for sale on Taobao was not comprehensive and there may be some minor differences in exact values for mercury and arsenic. However, we believe that seven products clearly exceed Chinese regulatory limits. These products can harm human health and the environment.

Skin-lightening cosmetics can be important source of public exposure to mercury, especially for women. We hope Taobao will immediately proceed with the following tasks:

1. Remove the products that were purchased from TAOBAO and detected as containing toxic metals.
2. Remove the products that were purchased from other places and detected as containing toxic metals.
3. Publically alert consumers that have purchased the products about the high mercury content
4. Release a statement to shops in TAOBAO that they should strengthen product management to prevent illegal products appearing for sale on TAOBAO.

Considering Taobao's concern for social responsibility, we hope that as an industry leader Taobao will be able to protect consumer and environmental health and set a good example.

Sincerely,

Green Beagle

Chongqing Two Rivers Volunteer Service Development Center

Dongguan Green Pearl River Environmental Protection Promotion Center

Shanghai Oasis Ecological Conservation and Communication Center

Green Anhui

Tianjin Green Youth Leadership Association

Green Longjiang

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