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US issues Chinese toothpaste warning

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4th June, 2007

THE ARTICLE

US issues Chinese toothpaste warning

Consumer safety officials in the USA have warned Americans against using a toothpaste made in China because it may be poisonous. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) declared that Chinese toothpaste may contain a toxic chemical commonly used in antifreeze – a substance that protects car engines from freezing in cold weather. The FDA said that while there have so far been no reports of toothpaste poisoning in the US, contamination has been reported in Mexico and Panama. It has also found traces of the chemical, diethylene glycol (DEG), in a shipment at the US border with Mexico and at retail stores in Florida and Puerto Rico. The agency said it did not want to alarm the public, but feels it needs to err on the side of caution and that it was better to be safe than sorry.

DEG is actually found in other foods. It is used in low-cost sweeteners and as a thickening agent in cooking. The FDA's concerns are that it should not be included in the ingredients of toothpaste. Officials say the chemical can be dangerous to children and to those with kidney or liver disease. The FDA's Deborah Autor expressed her fears over the substance, saying: "Our concern today is potentially about all toothpaste that comes in from China." She added: "Our estimate is that China makes up about US\$3.3 million of the US\$2 billion US toothpaste market." The FDA reported that DEG has been improperly added to a variety of other Chinese products, including sedatives and cough syrups. In Panama, last September, over 40 people died after taking a cough mixture containing DEG.

WARM-UPS

1. TOOTHPASTE: Walk around the class and talk to other students about toothpaste. Change partners often. After you finish, sit with your original partner(s) and share what you found out.

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

safety / toothpaste / poison / antifreeze / chemicals / borders / being safe / sweeteners / food additives / fears / Chinese products / sedatives / cough syrup

Have a chat about the topics you liked. Change topics and partners frequently.

3. QUALITY: With your partner(s), decide how much you trust the products from these countries. What kinds of products are they good at making? Change partners and share your findings.

- China
- USA
- Brazil
- Kenya
- England
- Japan
- India
- Italy

4. CONSUMER SAFETY: Are you sure everything you buy is safe / good for you? Discuss the possible dangers of the following. Rank them: 10 = "I'm 100% sure about the safety"; 1 = "I worry a lot about the safety".

- toothpaste
- McDonald's hamburgers
- mobile phones
- airplanes
- chocolate
- eggs
- microwave ovens
- children's toys

5. DANGEROUS CLASSROOM: Walk around your classroom with your partner. Try to find five possible dangers. Change partners and share your dangers. Talk about how to reduce these dangers.

6. TOOTHPASTE: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with toothpaste. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

7. QUICK DEBATE: Students A strongly believe all Chinese toothpaste should be banned around the world; Students B think Chinese-made toothpaste is perfectly safe. Change partners often. When you have finished, share your findings.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. Chinese-made toothpaste may contain a poisonous chemical. T / F
- b. A US agency recommends putting toothpaste in cars in the cold. T / F
- c. Several Americans have fallen ill after using Chinese toothpaste. T / F
- d. US safety officials advised citizens it's better to be sorry than safe. T / F
- e. A chemical the US considers toxic is used to sweeten food. T / F
- f. The chemical is harmful to kids and those with bad kidneys. T / F
- g. Fifty percent of the toothpaste Americans buy is made in China. T / F
- h. There were over 40 deaths in Panama due to the chemical. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| a. officials | toxic |
| b. poisonous | sleeping pills |
| c. declared | fears |
| d. traces | cut-rate |
| e. alarm | announced |
| f. low-cost | incorrectly |
| g. concerns | signs |
| h. makes up | bureaucrats |
| i. improperly | panic |
| j. sedatives | constitutes |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| a. warned Americans against | those with kidney or liver disease |
| b. a toxic chemical commonly | agent in cooking |
| c. a substance that protects car engines | used in antifreeze |
| d. contamination has been | using a toothpaste |
| e. it was better to be safe | about all toothpaste |
| f. a thickening | reported in Mexico |
| g. dangerous to children and to | US toothpaste market |
| h. Our concern today is potentially | than sorry |
| i. the US\$2 billion | mixture containing DEG |
| j. people died after taking a cough | from freezing |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words into the gaps in the text.

US issues Chinese toothpaste warning

Consumer _____ officials in the USA have warned Americans against using a toothpaste made in China because it may be _____. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) declared that Chinese toothpaste may _____ a toxic chemical commonly used in antifreeze – a _____ that protects car engines from freezing in cold weather. The FDA said that while there have so far been no reports of toothpaste poisoning in the US, _____ has been reported in Mexico and Panama. It has also found _____ of the chemical, diethylene glycol (DEG), in a shipment at the US border with Mexico and at retail stores in Florida and Puerto Rico. The agency said it did not want to _____ the public, but feels it needs to err on the side of caution and that it was better to be safe than _____.

DEG is actually found in other foods. It is used in _____ sweeteners and as a thickening agent in cooking. The FDA's _____ are that it should not be included in the ingredients of toothpaste. Officials say the chemical can be dangerous to children and to _____ with kidney or liver disease. The FDA's Deborah Autor expressed her fears over the substance, saying: "Our concern today is _____ about all toothpaste that comes in from China." She added: "Our _____ is that China makes up about US\$3.3 million of the US\$2 billion US toothpaste market." The FDA reported that DEG has been _____ added to a variety of other Chinese products, including sedatives and cough _____. In Panama, last September, over 40 people died after taking a cough _____ containing DEG.

substance
alarm
contain
sorry
contamination
safety
traces
poisonous

improperly
potentially
concerns
mixture
low-cost
syrups
estimate
those

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

US issues Chinese toothpaste warning

Consumer safety officials in the USA have warned Americans _____ toothpaste made in China because it _____. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) declared that Chinese toothpaste may contain a toxic chemical commonly _____ - a substance that protects car engines from freezing in cold weather. The FDA said that while there _____ no reports of toothpaste poisoning in the US, contamination has been reported in Mexico and Panama. It _____ of the chemical, diethylene glycol (DEG), in a shipment at the US border with Mexico and at retail stores in Florida and Puerto Rico. The agency said it did not _____, but feels it needs to err on the side of caution and that it was better to _____.

DEG is _____ foods. It is used in low-cost sweeteners and as a thickening agent in cooking. The FDA's concerns are that it should not be included in the ingredients of toothpaste. Officials say the chemical can be dangerous to children and _____ or liver disease. The FDA's Deborah Autor expressed her fears over the substance, saying: "Our concern today is _____ toothpaste that comes in from China." She added: "Our estimate is that China _____ US\$3.3 million of the US\$2 billion US toothpaste market." The FDA reported that DEG has been _____ a variety of other Chinese products, including sedatives and cough syrups. In Panama, last September, over 40 people died _____ mixture containing DEG.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'consumer' and 'safety'.

consumer	safety
-----------------	---------------

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• against• declared• protects• contamination• err• sorry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• sweeteners• ingredients• fears• makes up• improperly• mixture
---	--

STUDENT SURVEY

Write five GOOD questions about CONSUMER SAFETY in the table. Do this in pairs. Each student must write the questions on his / her own paper.

When you have finished, interview other students. Write down their answers.

	STUDENT 1	STUDENT 2	STUDENT 3
Q.1.			
Q.2.			
Q.3.			
Q.4.			
Q.5.			

- Now return to your original partner and share and talk about what you found out. Change partners often.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a) What did you think when you read the headline?
- b) Do you worry about the safety of consumer products?
- c) What kind of things do you think they put in toothpaste?
- d) Do you think twice about buying goods from other countries?
- e) Would you buy toothpaste made in China?
- f) Would you buy a Chinese-made computer or car?
- g) How do you think an antifreeze ingredient could be out in toothpaste?
- h) Do you worry about where the goods you buy come from?
- i) When was the last time you erred on the side of caution?
- j) Do you always think it is better to be safe than sorry?



STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a) Did you like reading this article?
- b) Do you ever worry about all the chemicals manufacturers put in our food and other products?
- c) Has there been a case of poisoning from tainted products in your country?
- d) Should Chinese toothpaste be banned around the world?
- e) Will you now go home and check your toothpaste?
- f) Do you trust the safety of medicine?
- g) Do you think the FDA is over-reacting?
- h) What is your favourite toothpaste and why?
- i) How would you like toothpastes to change?
- j) Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a) What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b) Was there a question you didn't like?
- c) Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d) What did you like talking about?
- e) Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

TOOTHPASTE:

Your new job is to make a new brand of toothpaste the best-selling in the world. Complete this table with your toothpaste-marketer partner(s).

Decisions	Why?
Toothpaste name	
New flavours	
Secret features	
Kind of TV ads	
Celebrity face to promote it	
Slogan	

- Change partners and share your ideas.
- Decide on an overall winner.

LANGUAGE

CORRECT WORD: Put the correct words from a–d below in the article.

US issues Chinese toothpaste warning

Consumer safety officials in the USA have warned Americans (1) ____ using a toothpaste made in China because it may be poisonous. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) (2) ____ that Chinese toothpaste may contain a toxic chemical commonly used in antifreeze – a substance that protects car engines (3) ____ freezing in cold weather. The FDA said that while there have so far been no reports of toothpaste poisoning in the US, contamination has been reported in Mexico and Panama. It has also found (4) ____ of the chemical, diethylene glycol (DEG), in a shipment at the US border with Mexico and at retail stores in Florida and Puerto Rico. The agency said it did not want to (5) ____ the public, but feels it needs to (6) ____ on the side of caution and that it was better to be safe than sorry.

DEG is actually found in other foods. It is used in low-cost sweeteners and as a thickening (7) ____ in cooking. The FDA's concerns are that it should not be included in the ingredients of toothpaste. Officials say the chemical (8) ____ be dangerous to children and to those with kidney or liver disease. The FDA's Deborah Autor expressed her fears (9) ____ the substance, saying: "Our concern today is potentially about all toothpaste that comes in from China." She added: "Our estimate is that China (10) ____ about US\$3.3 million of the US\$2 billion US toothpaste market." The FDA reported that DEG has been improperly (11) ____ to a variety of other Chinese products, including sedatives and cough syrups. In Panama, last September, over 40 people died (12) ____ taking a cough mixture containing DEG.

- | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|
| 1. | (a) against | (b) for | (c) not | (d) again |
| 2. | (a) declares | (b) declaration | (c) declared | (d) declaring |
| 3. | (a) by | (b) with | (c) for | (d) from |
| 4. | (a) braces | (b) traces | (c) races | (d) aces |
| 5. | (a) alarm bells | (b) stand-by | (c) alarm | (d) snooze |
| 6. | (a) err | (b) error | (c) mistake | (d) throw |
| 7. | (a) spy | (b) bureau | (c) agency | (d) agent |
| 8. | (a) should | (b) can | (c) has to | (d) to |
| 9. | (a) in | (b) under | (c) over | (d) out |
| 10. | (a) fabricates | (b) makes up | (c) lies about | (d) gives up |
| 11. | (a) added | (b) adds | (c) ads | (d) addition |
| 12. | (a) as | (b) with | (c) because | (d) after |

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information about tainted products. Talk about what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

3. TOOTHPASTE POSTER: Make a poster about toothpaste and its ingredients. Show your poster to your class in the next lesson. Vote on the best one(s).

4. MAGAZINE ARTICLE: Write a magazine article about consumer safety and the dangers of trusting imported goods.

Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Which article was best and why?

5. LETTER: Write a letter to the head of a Chinese toothpaste company. Ask him / her three questions about toothpaste safety. Give him / her three pieces of advice about how to sell more toothpaste. Read your letter to your partner(s) in your next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions.

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T b. F c. F d. F e. T f. T g. F h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| a. officials | bureaucrats |
| b. poisonous | toxic |
| c. declared | announced |
| d. traces | signs |
| e. alarm | panic |
| f. low-cost | cut-rate |
| g. concerns | fears |
| h. makes up | constitutes |
| i. improperly | incorrectly |
| j. sedatives | sleeping pills |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| a. warned Americans against | using a toothpaste |
| b. a toxic chemical commonly | used in antifreeze |
| c. a substance that protects car engines | from freezing |
| d. contamination has been | reported in Mexico |
| e. it was better to be safe | than sorry |
| f. a thickening | agent in cooking |
| g. dangerous to children and to | those with kidney or liver disease |
| h. Our concern today is potentially | about all toothpaste |
| i. the US\$2 billion | US toothpaste market |
| j. people died after taking a cough | mixture containing DEG |

GAP FILL:

US issues Chinese toothpaste warning

Consumer **safety** officials in the USA have warned Americans against using a toothpaste made in China because it may be **poisonous**. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) declared that Chinese toothpaste may **contain** a toxic chemical commonly used in antifreeze – a **substance** that protects car engines from freezing in cold weather. The FDA said that while there have so far been no reports of toothpaste poisoning in the US, **contamination** has been reported in Mexico and Panama. It has also found **traces** of the chemical, diethylene glycol (DEG), in a shipment at the US border with Mexico and at retail stores in Florida and Puerto Rico. The agency said it did not want to **alarm** the public, but feels it needs to err on the side of caution and that it was better to be safe than **sorry**.

DEG is actually found in other foods. It is used in **low-cost** sweeteners and as a thickening agent in cooking. The FDA's **concerns** are that it should not be included in the ingredients of toothpaste. Officials say the chemical can be dangerous to children and to **those** with kidney or liver disease. The FDA's Deborah Autor expressed her fears over the substance, saying: "Our concern today is **potentially** about all toothpaste that comes in from China." She added: "Our **estimate** is that China makes up about US\$3.3 billion of the US\$2 billion US toothpaste market." The FDA reported that DEG has been **improperly** added to a variety of other Chinese products, including sedatives and cough **syrops**. In Panama, last September, over 40 people died after taking a cough **mixture** containing DEG.

LANGUAGE WORK

- 1 - a 2 - c 3 - d 4 - b 5 - c 6 - a 7 - d 8 - b 9 - c 10 - b 11 - a 12 - d