



## **STANDARDS ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE**

### **PRESS RELEASE**

#### **SAZ HOSTS A STAKEHOLDER MEETING ON COUNTERFEIT COLGATE TOOTHPASTE ON THE ZIMBABWEAN MARKET**

The Standards Association of Zimbabwe (SAZ), hosted a stakeholder meeting on Wednesday 10 May 2006 to discuss the quality of counterfeit Colgate toothpaste currently available on the Zimbabwean market. The meeting, which was in response to recent numerous consumer complaints, was held at the SAZ Head Office in Borrowdale, Harare.

The SAZ director general, Mrs Maureen Mutasa chaired the meeting, which was attended by 17 representatives from the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA), Ministry of Health and Child Welfare's Port Health Authority (MOHCW - PHA), Retailers Association of Zimbabwe (RAZ), Colgate-Palmolive Company (CPC), Medicines Control Authority of Zimbabwe (MCAZ), Consumer Council of Zimbabwe (CCZ), African Regional Intellectual Properties Organization (ARIPO), Attorney General's Office, Ministry of Industry and International Trade (MIIT), Ministry of Health and Child Welfare (MOHCW) - Dental Association of Zimbabwe (DAZ) and SAZ.

Mrs Mutasa highlighted to the meeting that the availability of counterfeit toothpaste on the Zimbabwean market was brought to SAZ's attention by the CPC during a meeting between the SAZ and the CPC officials on 11 April 2006. Unidentified samples of the genuine and counterfeit toothpaste were then submitted to SAZ for independent tests.

In view of the serious potential health and safety risks associated with such counterfeit products, particularly those that come into contact with people especially the mouth. SAZ resolved to convene a stakeholder meeting aimed at discussing the tests results of the toothpaste samples submitted to SAZ and to find a possible way forward. Furthermore, the meeting provided an opportunity for the stakeholders to discuss the challenges faced by Zimbabwe with regards to imports against the backdrop of a monitoring system that is obviously failing to cope with the diverse range of imports into the country.

In his presentation on the background to the problem, the CPC managing director, Mr Davis Kanyama highlighted that Zimbabwe is among the countries that have been receiving the counterfeit Colgate toothpaste for the past three years. He used video clips to illustrate how some West African countries are dealing with the problem of counterfeit toothpaste products. Mr Kanyama told the meeting that his company is reliably informed that there are currently 14 containers of counterfeit Colgate toothpaste on the sea destined for this market. The CPC managing director added that it was becoming more difficult

for the authorities to detect the counterfeit products as they sometimes come into the country disguised as other products through misleading labelling of containers.

In concurrence with Mr Kanyama, the CCZ informed the meeting that they started to receive complaints about poor quality toothpaste around 2003 and this was mainly on that which had been bought from street vendors. CCZ however added that recently, the various complaints received and had been sent to CPC for testing, as CCZ has no testing facilities.

The SAZ manager, Chemical and Food Technology Division, Mr Benson Gabi whose division tested the samples highlighted that the wide range of the tests conducted by SAZ revealed that of the three samples, only one was safe for human use. The other two samples would not eliminate bad breath, but would instead cause bacterial infection leading to bad breath. The two unsafe samples had excessive levels of yeast and other bacteria with one containing large numbers of *Staphylococcus aureus*. He added that the microorganisms could have found their way into the products through poor sanitary and handling conditions during manufacture of the product. In addition the unsafe samples did not have the normal mint flavour typical of toothpaste.

The meeting expressed concern regarding the problem, particularly on the unacceptable high microbiological load in the counterfeit toothpaste, which could result in serious health risks bearing in mind the HIV/Aids problem affecting the country. Whilst there are other ways of protecting genuine toothpaste products from counterfeits such as through the provisions of the Trademarks Act, the meeting noted that there were currently no national standards/regulations in Zimbabwe for toothpaste. The tests performed by SAZ were based on a South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) standard.

It was also noted that whilst the MOHCW-PHA monitor hazardous substances, food products, medicines and transboundary diseases, they only deal with registered products brought to them by ZIMRA and this creates a gap in the monitoring system. Furthermore, of the 18 ports of entry into Zimbabwe, only seven are currently manned by the port health inspectors due to lack of resources. It was further noted that the Colgate toothpaste, which is subject to counterfeit, is not controlled by the MCAZ.

Mrs Mutasa informed the meeting that whilst SAZ is not currently involved in import quality control certification, it intends to soon embark on a feasibility study into its involvement in compulsory import/export quality control/certification. She added that SAZ decided to undertake the feasibility study following public outcry on the quality of imports, particularly from the Far East. This was also in response to requests by the Ministries of Finance and Industry and International Trade for SAZ to advise on the way to deal with the problem of poor quality imports. Mrs Mutasa added that the objective of the feasibility study is to identify the potential role that SAZ could play in import/export quality control with a view of strengthening the already existing monitoring systems.

On the way forward, the meeting agreed that there was an immediate need to raise adequate awareness on the problem of counterfeit Colgate toothpaste available on the

Zimbabwe market and the associated health and safety risks. A team to be led by CCZ was selected to spearhead this awareness campaign. The team comprises of representatives from CPC, MOHCW-PHA, ZIMRA, RAZ, DAZ, third party importers, the Zimbabwe Republic Police and the Ministry of Information.

SAZ was tasked to immediately convene a technical committee to develop toothpaste standards, which would then be referred to in legislation. The meeting also noted that SAZ's future involvement in compulsory import/export control would help strengthen the existing monitoring system but in the meantime, ZIMRA and the PHA should collaborate more closely for effective control. On the other hand, CPC would explore ways of securing the much-needed foreign currency to either increase imports of toothpaste or raw materials to manufacture the product locally.

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