



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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## Press Statement

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### CAP: Toxic Face Mask

The Consumers Association of Penang calls on the authorities to ensure that the face masks and other protective equipments sold in the market do not contain graphene and other potentially toxic nanoparticles as it is harmful to health.

The call is made following the action taken by the Canadian Government which has prohibited the use of face masks containing graphene due to the possibility of risks from inhalation of the graphene particles.

Graphene is a novel nanomaterial, comprising minute particles, which has been touted as having anti-viral and anti-bacterial properties

Face mask containing graphene can be identified by its dark coloured lining on the inner side of the mask. It is easily identifiable by its grey colour. According to studies graphene-laced face masks had the potential to cause early lung toxicity in animals.

In spite of the potential health risks, millions of face masks containing nanographene are being produced every day and sold around the world.

Graphene is a form of carbon that consists of nanoscopically thin flakes of hexagonally-arranged carbon atoms. When a material, like carbon or silver, is reduced to atoms — its smallest components — it starts to behave in unusual ways, which can increase its toxicity.

This change in behavior is what makes nanographene effective in killing bacteria, viruses, and other microbes. When used in masks, the coating of nanographene is meant to shield the user from particles in the air, slicing them apart as they are inhaled through the layer of graphene. However, as the masks are worn, flakes of nanographene slough off and can be inhaled into the lungs. Users of such face masks had complained of breathing difficulty, skin irritation and the feeling of breathing in cat hair.

In view of this, *Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL)* together with international NGOs had sent a letter to European officials asking them to take masks with nanoparticles off the market and ban the sale of Personal Protection Equipments (PPE) containing nanoform materials currently not authorised on the European Union (EU) market.

As wearing of face masks is a critical line of defense against COVID-19 and other airborne illnesses the presence of nanoparticles in the face mask should not be an additional health risk to consumers.

In view of the present situation where the wearing of face mask has become a necessity, CAP calls on the authorities to:

- > Ban the sale of face masks which contain nanoparticles of graphene or other materials.
- > Promulgate standards for face masks.

Meanwhile, consumers should take the cue from this and stay safe by opting for cotton masks which can prevent the spread of infection.

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