



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement

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CAP: Ethylene oxide in instant noodles is just the tip of the iceberg

The Consumers Association of Penang calls on the Ministry of Health to prohibit the use of ethylene oxide as a fumigant by the food industry.

The call is made in view of the latest report by Taipei's Department of Health which had found two types of instant noodles to contain ethylene oxide - a cancer-inducing substance.

In a statement, the department had found that a batch of "Ah Lai White Curry Noodles" from Malaysia and a batch of "Indomie: Special Chicken Flavour" noodles from Indonesia both contained ethylene oxide, a chemical compound associated with lymphoma and leukemia.

The department said testing revealed that ethylene oxide was detected in both the noodles and flavour packet of the Malaysian product but in only the flavour packet of the Indonesian product.

This is not the first time that ethylene oxide was detected in instant noodle. Last October the Ministry of Health Malaysia announced that residue of ethylene oxide was detected in a few flavours of Mi Sedaap, a product of Indonesia.

In August 2022, the Ministry of Health had recalled the vanilla flavoured Häagen-Dazs ice cream products as it was found to be contaminated with ethylene oxide.

The recent discovery of ethylene oxide in instant noodles is just the tip of the iceberg as are other processed food and food ingredients in the market that could be contaminated with the carcinogen.

Ethylene oxide is a gaseous substance with a range of potential applications, due to its highly reactive nature. It has been historically used in the food industry as a fumigant because of its capability to disinfect without using heat treatment.

The fumigation of foods and food storage areas with ethylene oxide has been discontinued in many parts of the world, including the EU which banned the use of ethylene oxide since 1991.

Due to its highly toxic nature, ethylene oxide is classed as a germ cell mutagen, a carcinogen and a reproductive toxin.

In spite of its toxicity some countries such as Canada, the USA and India still allow the use of ethylene oxide as a fumigant in applications relating to food, including freight containers and in warehouses. As such cross-contamination of products by ethylene oxide is common especially during storage and transportation.

Studies has shown that food products, including herbs, spices, nuts, cocoa beans, cocoa, cocoa cake, raisins, dried vegetables and gums, were often treated with ethylene oxide.

In view of the toxicity of ethylene oxide and the frequent occurrence in food products in the Malaysian market. The Consumers Association of Penang calls on the Ministry of Health to:

- Prohibit the use of ethylene oxide as a fumigant by the food industry.
- Test processed food and food ingredients for the presence of ethylene oxide especially those coming from countries that are still using it.

The recurring reports on unsafe Malaysian food products by overseas authorities clearly show that our food safety monitoring is inadequate.

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