

MEMORANDUM ON MISLEADING INFORMATION AND ADVERTISEMENT BY WATER FILTER PRODUCT COMPANIES

PREPARED BY,



SUPPORTED BY,



This memorandum can be used as Short Term Key Performance Index for:

- (i) Ministry of Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism (KPDNKK)
- (ii) Ministry of Health (MOH)
- (iii) National Water Services Commission (Suruhanjaya Perkhidmatan Air Negara - SPAN)

1. INTRODUCTION

WATER is a polar molecule based on 1 oxygen atom and 2 hydrogen atoms combined to form a stable molecule. This polar characteristic enables it to dissolve other materials which are of similar characteristics and earn the title of universal solvent.

Water is important for us and it is recommended we take 8 glasses of water daily. Drinking more water allows body to be replenished with water and eventually have our basic health boosted. This is nothing new, as water is part of our body to function normally against disease and cleansing the body. This takes place because water creates medium for biochemical reactions in our body.

The water we get from our taps is based on water quality approval from Ministry of Health (MOH). Treated water that is supplied has allowable levels of compounds and chemicals. These levels are seen as safe level based on World Health Organisation (WHO) standard which is followed by MOH.

Lately, issues about polluted water supply, toxic materials and others have helped marketing water filters. The perceptions given about our water supply system are in the hands of the water filter companies and its agents. However, there has not been any death reported due to such water supply (as perceived by the water filter companies).

The main issue here is the reducing trust by consumers due to marketing methods that are misleading the consumers through information and advertisements by the water filter companies.

2. ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS IN DETERIORATION OF WATER QUALITY

According to monitoring of Ministry of Health, our water supply meets the required standard. However, the availability of dirt in supplied water makes consumers have different perceptions.

The impurities in supplied treated water can be due to few reasons:

- (i) Pipe leakages that carries external contaminant (dirt such as soil particles)
 - a. Pipe leakage in public pipe system
 - b. Inefficient pipe maintenance and leakage repairing works
 - c. Pipe leakage in consumer's premise
- (ii) Failure to maintain water storage tank
 - a. Water storage tank in consumers' premise needs to be maintained once every 6 months or 1 year (based on the water quality)
 - b. Service Reservoirs (which is under the water supply companies jurisdiction) must be maintained periodically
- (iii) Old piping (galvanized pipes) that are more than 15 years in usage
 - a. consumers need to replace and maintain the pipes in their premises
 - b. water industry need to replace and maintain pipes in the public water supply system

3. CLAIMS BY WATER FILTER COMPANIES

Many consumers are duped into buying water filters that promises health claims and many other benefits. Our survey on advertisements summarizes the following claims:

- (i) improves immune systems
- (ii) reduces allergy
- (iii) gives 'energy' that improves activeness
- (iv) reduces or totally remove 'toxic materials' from supplied water
- (v) improves dissolved oxygen in water
- (vi) and many other claims

These claims do not get any accreditation or approvals from MOH or SIRIM. In some cases, pictures of selected cases are given to convince consumers.

One sales person was quoted during telephone interview:

His view: our filter can break water molecules into smaller particles and easily absorbed by body.

Scientific fact: water molecules are held by hydrogen bonds that hold the water molecules together; this bond cannot be broken by filtration process. Body has its natural way to absorb water and filtration does not help improve such biological process.

Usage of water filters is ever increasing and there is no control of claims put up by water filter companies.

4. WATER FILTER USAGE IN MALAYSIA

WECAM have conducted a national level survey on usage of water filters in Malaysia (including Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan). This study was based on the households' statistics given by Department of Statistics Malaysia.

Table 1: Percentage of Water Filter Usage in Malaysia According to State, 2008/2009

<i>State</i>	<i>Number of household studied</i>	<i>Number of household with water filter</i>	<i>Percentage of water filter usage (%)</i>
Johor	128	15	11.72
Kedah	128	70	54.69
Kelantan	128	6	4.69
Kuala Lumpur	64	16	25.00
Labuan	64	2	3.13
Malacca	128	22	17.19
Negeri Sembilan	128	9	7.03
Pahang	128	1	0.78
Perak	128	36	28.13
Perlis	128	21	16.41
Penang	128	77	60.16
Sabah	128	6	4.69
Sarawak	128	28	21.88
Selangor	128	22	17.19
Terengganu	128	32	25.00
TOTAL	1792	363	-

Table 1 shows percentage of water filter usage according to state. Highest usage was detected in Penang (60.10%), followed by Kedah (54.69%) and Perak (28.13 %). In average, 20.26 % of filter usage was detected in the whole study.

Table 2: Percentage of Malaysian Consumer Awareness on the Type and Function of Water Filter, 2008/2009

<i>State</i>	<i>Number of household studied</i>	<i>Number of households that are aware of Type and Function of Filter</i>	<i>Percentage of awareness on the Type and Function of water filter (%)</i>
Johor	128	12	9.38
Kedah	128	2	1.56
Kelantan	128	1	0.78
Kuala Lumpur	64	0	0.00
Labuan	64	0	0.00
Melaka	128	6	4.69
Negeri Sembilan	128	6	4.69
Pahang	128	0	0.00
Perak	128	5	3.91
Perlis	128	7	5.47
Pulau Pinang	128	5	3.91
Sabah	128	5	3.91
Sarawak	128	9	7.03
Selangor	128	8	6.25
Terengganu	128	0	0.00
TOTAL	1792	66	-

Table 2 shows the awareness on the type and function of water filters. In average, only 3.68 % respondents are aware of the type and function of the water filter. A huge drop between usage level and understanding level can be seen. This is a serious issue that needs to be solved amicably.

Consumers play vital role in ensuring that they understand the function of equipment they invest in.

5. TYPE OF WATER FILTER USAGE

- I. Point of Entry (PoE): Filters that are placed after water meters. These filters will be regulated under Water Services Industry Act 2006. PoE filters must be fitted with valves that allow one way flow only (control valves). This is to prevent cross-contamination from the filters to public water supply system.
- II. Point of Usage (PoU): filters are usually placed in usage areas such as kitchen to allow filtered waters to be consumed directly.

6. RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS

- I. Consumers' responsibility:
 - a. Check the filter type and its applicability to situation faced. Check on beneficial claims by water filter companies with relevant authorities.
 - b. If your filter removes chlorine, do not store the water. It must be consumed immediately after boiling. Water **MUST** not be stored without chlorine for a long period of time.
 - c. If you have a filter, maintain it well. Failure to maintain can cause serious cross-contamination to the water that you consume due to the filter malfunction.
 - d. If you have water quality problem or would like to report a misleading advertisement / purchase of product, you can make a complaint to National Consumer Complaint Centre (NCCC) via **nccc@nccc.org.my** or e-Aduan at **www.nccc.org.my** or call the complaint centre at **03-7877 9000**.

- II. Government's Role (Key Performance Index – KPI, load to be achieved):
- a. KPI Load – 6/12 to Ministry of Domestic Trade, Cooperatives, and Consumerism (KPDNKK)
 - i. Control and reduction of misleading advertisement, information and marketing
 - ii. Transparent and clear processes for identification, recall and banning of products
 - iii. Clear and latest report on monitoring
 - iv. Strong redress mechanism to assist victims
 - v. Formation of capable monitoring agency
 - vi. Give correct information to consumers
 - b. KPI Load – 3/12 to Ministry of Health
 - i. Joint monitoring with KPDNKK on health claims
 - ii. To give latest and clear explanation on treated water quality in Malaysia to consumers
 - iii. To prepare water quality monitoring report that is accessible to all
 - c. KPI Load – 3/12 to National Water Services Commission (SPAN)
 - i. Ensure strict regulation for Point of Entry (PoE) filter installation.
 - ii. SPAN must ensure water operators treat and supply water in approved standards. Strict standard and monitoring must be enforced.
 - iii. Ensure old pipe replacement works are in order. This works must be done as scheduled maintenance in near future. This should also be as part of licensing condition to water operators.

7. CONCLUSION

Ensuring good quality of treated water supply is the responsibility of the water services companies and relevant government agencies. Infact, water filter companies have no role in this. WECAM hopes that relevant authorities will carry out their responsibilities immediately to curb the problem.

Preventing is better than curing.

Yang benar,

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