

MEDIA RELEASE

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PAGB response to BBC Radio 5 Live investigation regarding the associated fire risk of paraffin-based emollients

In response to a BBC Radio 5 Live Investigates programme about emollients and the associated fire risk, Donna Castle, Director of Public Affairs and Communications at PAGB, the consumer healthcare association, said:

“Safety is of paramount importance to the consumer healthcare industry and we take concerns about safety warnings on emollients very seriously. We were deeply saddened to hear about Mr Bicat’s death and offer our condolences to his family.

“It is important to reassure people that the normal use of emollients in the home is considered appropriately safe. Emollients are an important treatment and play a vital role in helping people manage the symptoms of chronic and often severe dry skin conditions, such as eczema and psoriasis. People should continue to use these products, but it is vital they understand the fire risk associated with a build-up of residue on fabric and crucially, take steps to mitigate that risk.

“Emollient creams are not flammable; the risk occurs when residue from emollients is absorbed into fabric, such as clothing or bedding, and builds up over time. This increases the flammability of the fabric, such that if it is exposed to a naked flame, even after washing, it will burn faster than fabric without any emollient residue.

“PAGB and its member companies have been actively working with the medicines regulator, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), on this issue. It was originally believed that the issue was related to emollients with more than 50% paraffin, however, evidence now suggests that other emollients can also increase the flammability of fabric and percentage of paraffin is not as relevant as previously thought.

“Effectively communicating this associated risk to people who use emollients is imperative. We have been working with MHRA to agree a standard warning that can be added to the packaging of all emollient products consistently to aid people’s awareness and understanding of the issue. Once the details of this warning have been finalised with MHRA, all PAGB member companies are committed to updating their packaging.

“As medicines are highly regulated to ensure public safety, there is a regulatory process companies have to follow for the regulator to approve any changes to medicine packaging. This process will need to be followed for warning statements to be added to emollient packs and companies are working with MHRA to implement this as efficiently as possible. Typically, following MHRA approval of the packaging change, new packs will appear on shelf in six to 12 months.

“In addition to the need for on-pack warnings, we also agree with MHRA and fire services that more should be done to raise awareness of the need to keep clothing or bedding that has been in contact with emollient products away from sources of fire, such as candles and lit cigarettes. The consumer healthcare industry is committed to working with MHRA to raise

awareness and is supportive of the agency's intention to establish a stakeholder group on this.”

– ENDS –

Notes to editors:

PAGB, the consumer healthcare association, represents the manufacturers of branded OTC medicines, self care medical devices and food supplements in the UK.

PAGB defines Self Care as the actions people take for themselves and their families to promote and maintain good health and wellbeing and to take care of their self-treatable conditions.

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