

Saturday, 5 April 2008

IMPORTED CERAMIC COOKWARE DECLARED TO BE DANGEROUS

Consumers who use a tagine cooking pot are being warned to check its country of origin, as a number being imported from Morocco have been found to contain excessive levels of lead.

Tagines have a round base with a conical shaped lid, and are commonly used to cook stews.

SA Consumer Affairs Minister, Jennifer Rankine has signed a declaration of dangerous goods covering all glazed ceramic cookware that contains excessive levels of lead and cadmium. The declaration complements the current Australian Customs Service regulations for ceramic cookware.

“Any store that sells tagines or other glazed ceramic cookware containing excessive levels of lead now risks a fine of up to \$10,000”, Minister Rankine said.

“Traders need to be careful that the products they offer for sale do not present any health or safety risks for consumers.”

The Minister issued a public warning about tagines containing lead on 29 February 2008, but further monitoring and testing has confirmed that the problem is more widespread.

“The cooking pots are produced in a range of different countries, but all of the pots tested that exceeded the lead limit were from Morocco,” she said.

“The acceptable testing limit for lead is 7mg/L, however two of the tagines tested were found to have lead contamination levels of 1000mg/L and 900mg/L.

“That means these two cooking pots had more than 100 times the acceptable limit of lead for imported glazed cookware. With such high levels of lead present, it is possible that food could be contaminated during the cooking process.”

The Office of Consumer and Business Affairs (OCBA) has identified the two stores selling tagines containing with excessive lead as Sahara Moroccan Casbah located in Sturt Street, Adelaide; and Zelij Moroccan Interiors Adelaide located on Magill Road, Stepney. Both stores have withdrawn their Moroccan tagines from sale.

Consumers are advised to go back to the store where they purchased their tagine and ask whether it is one that has been identified as containing lead. Alternatively they can contact OCBA for advice. Under fair trading legislation consumers may be entitled to a refund, exchange or credit note for goods that are not of merchantable quality.

Health authorities are concerned about the serious health risks if lead is consumed in sufficient amounts. Consumers who are concerned about the safety aspects should consult their local doctor. This is particularly important for children and pregnant women who are more vulnerable to effects of lead contamination.

For further information consumers can contact OCBA's Product Safety section on 8152 0732 or Public Health on 8226 7100.

Section 91A of the *Fair Trading Act 1987*, contains a provision for a public statement warning people about matters that may adversely affect their interests if they purchase a particular good or service.