



CONSUMERS ASSOCIATION OF SINGAPORE

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MEDIA RELEASE

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CASE tests disposable chopsticks for sulphur dioxide residue

The Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE) commissioned a test on 20 samples of disposable chopsticks¹ sold in Singapore for sulphur dioxide residue, which may be harmful to one's health in excessive amounts. The test results showed less than 400mg/kg of sulphur dioxide found in all samples.

Sulphur dioxide is often used as a bleaching agent and to prevent the growth of mould and pests in disposable chopsticks. Excessive sulphur dioxide may negatively affect the human respiratory system. It also reacts easily with substances to form harmful variants, such as sulphurous acid and sulphate particles. People who are allergic to these variants may develop difficulties in breathing and skin allergies.

Scope and Methodology

The 20 samples were selected by random sampling and purchased from departmental stores, supermarkets and stores in the heartland areas. As a form of control and also because of traceability issues, disposable chopsticks provided for takeaway at cooked food stalls and eateries were excluded.

The test was conducted using a methodology adopted from the Pearson's Composition and Analysis of Foods (1991). The method included warm water leaching from the sample, followed by titration. The samples were cut into smaller pieces for testing. For every 1cm² of surface area, 2ml of water was used to soak the samples. The samples were soaked at 60°C for 30 minutes. After soaking, the solution obtained was then tested for presence of sulphur dioxide.

Test Results

According to the test results, a range of residual sulphur dioxide between 7mg/kg and 364 mg/kg was detected in the 20 samples. The full findings of the test can be found in the Annex.

Standards

In Singapore, there is no specific standard regulating the amount of sulphur dioxide residue in disposable chopsticks. However, we note that the Guobiao Standards, administered by the Standardisation Administration of the People's Republic of China, states that sulphur dioxide residue should not exceed 600 mg/kg in disposable chopsticks. The Taiwan Food and Drug Administration also has a Sanitation Standard for Disposable Chopsticks indicating that the sulphur dioxide residue found in disposable chopsticks should not exceed 500 mg/kg.

¹ Disposable chopsticks refers to chopsticks made from bamboo or wood that are intended for direct usage without washing or rinsing, and are not re-used.

Separately, residual substances present in food-contact articles do not pose any food safety concern unless they migrate from the food contact articles into food. Thus, the Singapore Food Regulations, administered by the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority (AVA), stipulates that all food contact articles do not migrate any harmful substances to the food coming into contact with them. AVA conducts regular sampling and testing of food contact materials to ensure that they do not release any harmful substances into food. Currently, disposable utensils used in Singapore meet safety standards for migration and are safe for handling food.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the test, CASE is of the view that disposable chopsticks found in Singapore are generally safe for use.

However, as a word of caution, consumers are advised to avoid using disposable chopsticks that look too white. As sulphur dioxide is used as a bleaching agent, disposable chopsticks that appear too white are likely to have been bleached before, thus potentially containing sulphur dioxide. Disposable chopsticks that give off a pungent smell should also be avoided as this may indicate plausible chemical use. Lastly, disposable chopsticks are meant for single-use and consumers are advised not to use them repeatedly.

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Consumers Association of Singapore:

The Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE) is an independent, non-profit organisation that is committed towards protecting consumers' interest through information and education, and promoting an environment of fair and ethical trade practices. One of its key achievements is in advocating for the Consumer Protection (Fair Trading) Act (CPFTA) which came into effect on 1 March 2004.

For more information, please visit the CASE website at www.case.org.sg or follow us on:

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Annex – List of 20 Disposable Chopsticks Tested and the Results

No	Name and Packaging	Purchased From	Distributed By	County of Manufacture	Sulphur Dioxide (SO ₂), mg/kg
1	BM 40 Disposable Bamboo Chopstick CleanPac 天然竹筷 30 pairs	Super Budget Store 19 Ghim Moh Road #01-255 Singapore 270019	-	-	364
2	Pacific 遠洋 86 pairs	Good Price Hub 135 Jurong Gateway Road Singapore 600135	-	-	364
3	Arrow Globe (Welcome) 80 pairs	Ames One (Asia) Pte Ltd Blk 531 Upper Cross St #01-58 Hong Lim Complex Singapore 050531	-	-	335
4	Longfeng Disposable Chopstick 30 pairs	Ames One (Asia) Pte Ltd Blk 531 Upper Cross St #01-58 Hong Lim Complex Singapore 050531	-	Huizhou, Guangdong China	332
5	元禄箸 白楊材 100 pairs	Japan Home (Retail) Pte Ltd 1 Vista Exchange Green, The Star Vista #B1-29 Singapore 138617	福岡県筑紫野市二日市南 3-7-15 Fukuoka Japan	China	320
6	Bamboo Chopstick 30 Pairs/Pkt 30 pairs	Offer & Save Blk 827 Tampines St 81 #01-136 Singapore 520827	-	-	311
7	Aspen Genroku 80 pairs	SKP Pte Ltd Blk 531 #01-60 Upper Cross Street Singapore 050531	-	-	300

8	Ez Cook Bamboo Chopsticks 50 pairs	Japan Home (Retail) Pte Ltd 1 Vista Exchange Green, The Star Vista #B1-29 Singapore 138617	Japan Home Centre (H.K.) Ltd 20/F, Tower B, Southmark, 11 Yip Hing Street, Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong	-	271
9	KW-Chops-Bamboo 100 pairs	SKP Pte Ltd Blk 531 #01-60 Upper Cross Street Singapore 050531	-	-	263
10	SKP 70 Pairs	SKP Pte Ltd 90 Hougang Ave 10 #04-12 Singapore 538766	-	-	251
11	White Poplar Genroku Chopsticks No Envelope 70 pairs	DAISO 2 Jurong East Central 1 #02-06 JCUBE Singapore 609731	DAISO Industries Co. Ltd. 1-4-14 Saijyo Yoshiyukihigashi, Higashihiroshima, Hiroshima, 739-8501 JAPAN	China	178
12	Grace Party Wares Bamboo Chopstick 21cm x 100s 80 pairs	MCP Fairmart Pte Ltd Blk 135 Jurong Gateway Road #01-317 Singapore 600135	-	-	175
13	Grace Party Wares Wooden Chopsticks 40s 40 pairs	MCP Fairmart Pte Ltd Blk 135 Jurong Gateway Road #01-317 Singapore 600135	-	-	170
14	竹箸 75 pairs	Unihome 21 Ghim Moh Road #01-193 Singapore 270021	-	-	147
15	Simply Living Wooden Chopsticks 50 pairs	Cold Storage Star Vista 1 Vista Green #B1-02/35/36 Singapore 138617	DFI Brands Limited, 5/F Devon House, Taikoo Place, Quarry Bay, Hong Kong	China	129

16	No Brand 80 pairs	Wei-Ji Trading Blk 335 Smith Street #01-160 Chinatown Complex Singapore 050335	-	-	89
17	Home Proud Disposable Chopsticks 50 pairs	NTUC Fairprice Blk 135 Jurong East St 13 #01-337 Singapore 600135	NTUC FairPrice Co-operative Ltd No. 1 Joo Koon Circle Level 13 Singapore 629117	Vietnam	81
18	Party's by Goldshines Disposable Chopstick 50 pairs	Isetan Singapore 3 Gateway Drive Singapore 608532	-	-	67
19	精品筷 Chopstick 29 pairs	SKP Pte Ltd 90 Hougang Ave 10 #04-12 Singapore 538766	-	-	47
20	Yanagi Chopstick 20 pairs	Iroha Mart 133 New Bridge Road #B1-11 Chinatown Point Singapore 059413	-	Japan	7

Note: The above list is sorted by the amount of residual sulphur dioxide, from highest to lowest.