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## Scale of UK Zamzam Racket Raises Alarm

Roger Harrison, Arab News

JEDDAH, 16 October 2007 — Allegations that poisonous Zamzam water is being smuggled into Britain are exercising the minds of UK Muslims. The containers, which sell for the equivalent of SR25 each, are purporting to come from Makkah on their labels.

Containers that have been analyzed by UK health and safety officials have been found to hold water that contains raised levels of arsenic and nitrates that, if consumed over extended periods of time, could prove fatal.

Saudi Arabia forbids the sale of Zamzam. The holy water is freely distributed at its source. Its bottling and distribution is strictly controlled and monitored by the government and commercial export is illegal. Each year, however, millions of foreign pilgrims carry containers home as private export.

Genuine Zamzam, analyzed in 1971, contains greater quantities of calcium and magnesium salts than most other waters. It also contains fluorides that strengthen teeth's enamel.

However, some of the fake Zamzam has been analyzed and found to contain almost three times as much nitrate and twice as much arsenic as the World Health Organization believes is safe. Children under six months and elderly people are particularly vulnerable to excessive nitrate while regular consumption of arsenic in water is responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths a year in southeast Asia.

Consuming water contaminated with nitrates can cause a blood disorder called methemoglobinemia. This is a condition in which the iron in the hemoglobin molecule — the red blood pigment — is defective, making it unable to carry oxygen effectively to the tissues. Some research shows that nitrates in drinking water may be associated with some types of cancer. Exposure to arsenic may result in arsenic poisoning and increased risks of several types of cancer. Diluted arsenic has been associated with disorders of the nervous system, loss of sensation in the limbs and hearing impairment.

An analysis carried out by the London Borough of Hackney on a sample they took showed twice the level of arsenic and nitrate permitted by law.

Zamzam water, held as sacred within Islam, is much sought after by Muslims both for its spiritual and physical connections. Its provenance is immaculate and recorded in Islamic texts. According to tradition, the Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him), his wife Hagar and their baby son, Ismaeel, suffered from scarcity of water after settling in Makkah. When Hagar thought Ismaeel was dying of thirst, she searched for water with no success and the route of her search now comprises part of the Grand Mosque in Makkah. Then a spring appeared under the feet of Ishmael and it has continued to flow from that spot ever since. Today Muslims from all over the world drink from the

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Prince Ahmed Bin Salman



9/11



Arab News 30th Anniversary Supplement



Life of Prophet Muhammad



well, believing it to be divinely blessed.

Yunes Teinaz, who advises the Central London Mosque in Regent's Park and who is an environmental health expert, was unable to say where the water originated. He said that it was not genuine Zamzam water; he confirmed that commercial export of the holy water was illegal under Saudi law.

The Health and Social Services website of the Central London Mosque ([www.iccservices.org.uk](http://www.iccservices.org.uk)) quotes a BBC article reporting the seizure of a consignment of suspected fake Zamzam at the start of Ramadan by Westminster City Council.

The "Muslim Weekly" in the UK reported last week that inspectors in the London Borough of Hackney seized a vanload of contaminated counterfeit cases of the water.

Similar seizures have been carried out in Gloucester, Barnsley and Leicester.

Hackney council expressed its concern that Muslims may be exploited and tricked into buying fake Zamzam water during Ramadan and that exploitation of people's faith for profit was "abhorrent."

The potential for fraud and the profit in sale of fake Zamzam to the unwary is huge. In a recent case quoted by Teinaz, an Islamic bookshop was selling an estimated 20,000 liters of Zamzam water a week.

Muslim organizations have advised the boycott of Zamzam water until the situation regularizes. The UK Food Standards Agency has warned Muslims not to buy the water. "Zamzam water is extremely important for more than a billion Muslims," Teinaz said. "Muslims believe it not only has healing powers but it is important to them spiritually as well. Whenever people see it they will buy it."

Teinaz said he "was aware" of examples of vans transporting vast quantities of the fake water to mosques where their imams ordered their followers to buy the substance. Some of the water, according to customs officials, is smuggled into Britain in crates of vegetables and furniture.

Speaking to "Muslim Weekly", Teinaz said traders had misled the authority at air and seaports for years telling them that Zamzam was for external use.

"I would like to urge those selling the water to fear Allah. They're making money at the expense of their brothers and sisters' health who will end up very ill by consuming the contaminated water," he said. "It is very sad to see a Muslim cheating another Muslim."

He also advised Muslims who encounter this fake water to report it without delay to their Local Authority Environmental Health or Trading Standards Department.

A strictly sampled and controlled analysis carried out in the Kingdom and simultaneously in the UK, would set a benchmark for the identification of genuine Zamzam water. The UK has a highly developed and very active Trading Standards Office that checks and enforces the standards of a very wide range of goods and services. The Food Standards Authority is equally punctilious in the patrolling of quality and description of all food products in the UK.

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