

Many American Consumers Worry About Product Safety

Contributed by Harris Interactive
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ROCHESTER, N.Y. â€“ July 19, 2007â€” Numerous safety problems with goods produced or manufactured in developing countries such as China and South Africa have occurred over the past several months. According to a new poll, nearly two-thirds of U.S. adults lack confidence in the safety of a variety of products produced in developing nations, including over-the-counter medications, prescription drugs, herbal remedies and nutritional supplements, and packaged or prepared foods. Eight in ten adults are concerned about counterfeit products that claim to be produced or manufactured in the U.S.

These are some of the results of an online survey of 2,071 U.S. adults, ages 18 and older, conducted by Harris Interactive between June 26 and 28, 2007 for The Wall Street Journal Onlineâ€™s Health Industry Edition (www.wsj.com/health)

Three in four adults believe measures can be taken to ensure the safety of products produced or manufactured for the export market. However, there is no clear consensus as to which approach would be most effective. When given a set of options, U.S. adults are most likely to prefer banning products that have been proven to be unsafe, or instituting bigger fines or stiffer penalties to companies that produce unsafe products (22% and 16%, respectively). Far fewer adults believe that the best way of ensuring product safety is to rely on more government inspections of agricultural or manufacturing sites or better company oversight of their own facilities (7% for each).

When asked specifically about China's announcement that it will beef up its oversight activities in the wake of multiple product safety problems, only three in ten U.S. adults said they are confident that such measures will improve the safety of products produced or manufactured in China.

Many U.S. consumers appear to be considering country of origin when making purchasing decisions, on at least some occasions. Six in ten adults say they always check to see where a product is produced or manufactured (29%) or do so when making purchases they believe might directly impact their familyâ€™s health and safety (32%).

Katherine Binns, Division President for Healthcare Research at Harris Interactive, comments, "These findings suggest that if product safety problems continue it is likely that the general public will increasingly consider country of origin when making purchasing decisions. Furthermore, the public will not be assured that appropriate action has been taken if increased oversight only takes place in the countries that are producing or manufacturing products for the export market or if oversight is left in the hands of the companies that operate such facilities."TABLE 1CONFIDENCE IN PRODUCTS MANUFACTURED IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES"Based on what you know or have heard, how confident are you in the safety of the following types of products when they are produced or manufactured in developing countries like China, India or South Africa?"Base: All adultsÂ Very/ Somewhat Confident (NET)Very ConfidentSomewhat ConfidentNot Very/ Not at All Confident (NET)Not Very ConfidentNot at All ConfidentNot Sure

Childrenâ€™s toys%4410344822269

Personal care products like toothpaste, moisturizer, or shampoo%3913265523326

Over-the-counter medications like antacids, sleep aids, or cough and cold medicines%318236326376

Prescription drugs, including generic and brand name drugs%3010216323406

Herbal remedies or nutritional supplements%295236428367

Packaged or prepared foodsÂ 327266125366

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.TABLE 2CONCERNS ABOUT COUNTERFEIT PRODUCTS"How concerned are you about counterfeit products that claim to have been produced or manufactured in the U.S. but actually come from other countries?"Base: All AdultsÂ Total%

Very/Somewhat Concerned (NET)82

Very concerned36

Somewhat concerned45

Not Very /Not at All Concerned(NET)18

Not very concerned15

Not at all concerned4

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.
TABLE 3THE PUBLIC'S PURCHASING BEHAVIORS"Which one of these statements best describes your concerns about the safety of products originating from other countries?"Base: All Adults' Total%

I check to see where a product is produced or manufactured only when buying something that can directly impact my or my family's health and safety.32

I always check to see where a product is produced or manufactured when making a purchase for myself or my family.29

It has never occurred to me to check to see where a product is produced or manufactured.23

If it's a product I like I don't care where it's produced or manufactured.16
TABLE 4CONFIDENCE IN CHINA'S RESPONSE TO PRODUCT SAFETY PROBLEMS"In response to recent product safety problems, the Chinese government has announced it will improve its efforts to ensure the safety of products exported from China to other countries. How confident are you that this will improve the safety of products produced or manufactured in China?"Base: All Adults' Total%

Very/Somewhat Confident (NET)30

Very confident3

Somewhat confident27

Not Very/Not at All Confident (NET)63

Not very confident37

Not at all confident26

Not sure8
TABLE 5ENSURING PRODUCT SAFETY IN A GLOBAL MARKET PLACE"Which one of these approaches do you feel would be the best way of ensuring the safety of products produced or manufactured for the export market (i.e., for sale in other countries)?"Base: All Adults' Total%

Think Approaches Can be Taken to Ensure Safe Products for Export Market (NET)77

Banning the sale of products that have been proven to be unsafe 22

Bigger fines or stiffer penalties for companies that produce or manufacture unsafe products 16

More frequent customs inspections and product testing in the countries that receive these products 14

Bigger fines or stiffer penalties for countries that have recurring product safety problems 10

Better oversight by the companies that produce or manufacture the products 7

More government inspections of agricultural sites and manufacturing facilities 7

Something else 2

I don't think any approaches can be taken to ensure safer products for the export market.7

Not sure15

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Methodology

Harris Interactive® conducted this online survey within the United States between June 26 and 28, 2007 among a

national cross section of 2,071 adults, ages 18 years and over. Figures for age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, income and region were weighted where necessary to align with population proportions. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All surveys are subject to several sources of error. These include: sampling error (because only a sample of a population is interviewed); measurement error due to question wording and/or question order, deliberately or unintentionally inaccurate responses, nonresponse (including refusals), interviewer effects (when live interviewers are used) and weighting.

With one exception (sampling error) the magnitude of the errors that result cannot be estimated. There is, therefore, no way to calculate a finite "margin of error" for any survey and the use of these words should be avoided.

With pure probability samples, with 100 percent response rates, it is possible to calculate the probability that the sampling error (but not other sources of error) is not greater than some number. With pure probability samples of 2,071 one could say with a ninety-five percent probability that the results would have a sampling error of +/- 3.5 percentage points. Sampling error for data based on sub-samples would be higher and may vary. However, that does not take other sources of error into account. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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In 2007, the Online Journal received the Webby Award for Best Website in the Financial Services category. In 2005, the Online Journal was awarded a Codie Award for Best Online News Service for the second consecutive year, and its Health Industry Edition was awarded Best Online Science or Technology Service for the third consecutive year.

About Harris Interactive

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To become a member of the Harris Poll Online and be invited to participate in online surveys, register at www.harrispollonline.com.

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