

Nicaragua seizes tainted Chinese toothpaste 6,000 tubes suspected of containing deadly chemical used in antifreeze

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MANAGUA, Nicaragua - Nicaraguan police seized 6,000 tubes of a Chinese-made toothpaste suspected of containing a chemical that killed at least 51 people in nearby Panama last year, the health minister said Sunday.

All U.S. imports of Chinese toothpaste were halted last week to test for diethylene glycol — a chemical commonly used in antifreeze and brake fluid.

Nicaraguan Health Minister Maritza Cuan told Channel 8 the seized toothpaste, labeled “Excel” and “Mr. Cool,” had been smuggled in from Panama.

“What we have to do now is recover all the toothpaste imported into the country so it doesn’t damage the population,” Cuan said.

On Friday health officials in Costa Rica said they seized more than 350 tubes of Chinese-made toothpaste tainted with the deadly chemical.

Health Secretary Maria Luisa Avila said 56 tubes of toothpaste containing diethylene glycol were found in the northern city of Liberia, and 306 more were seized from a warehouse in the capital of San Jose.

Avila also said her department issued a nationwide alert although there have been no reports of anyone falling ill.

51 deaths in Panama

In Nicaragua, the toothpaste was seized from a vast market in the capital. Some vendors also were hawking it door to door, Cuan said. The product also could have been smuggled from Panama to Honduras and Colombia.

Panama ordered the toothpaste pulled from shelves there earlier this month after finding it contained diethylene glycol.

The Chinese government has said it is investigating the toothpaste, which the manufacturer has said is safe.

At least 51 people died in Panama since October after taking medicine contaminated with diethylene glycol. The substance was found in cough syrup

and other medications made in a Panama government laboratory from a falsely labeled shipment that workers thought was glycerin. The chemical was traced to a Chinese company.

Diethylene glycol, or DEG, is a thickening agent used as a low-cost — but frequently deadly — substitute for glycerin, a sweetener commonly used in drugs.

DEG was blamed for the deaths of at least 51 people in Panama last year after it was mixed into cough syrup, another case with possible ties to China.

Earlier this year, pet food ingredients from China were blamed in the deaths of dogs and cats in North America.