

Beef sold in Zambia contained harmful chemical: govt

July 19 2013

Beef products imported from Europe and distributed in Zambia by leading meat company Zambeef have tested positive for aromatic aldehyde, a chemical which can cause cancer, the health minister said Friday.

Zambeef last month recalled from its retail outlets all imported products after concerns that they contained the [chemical](#), which is also used to embalm dead bodies, prompting laboratory tests.

"I can confirm that the presence of formaldehydes has been confirmed in the samples that were taken to South Africa for further investigations," Health Minister Joseph Kasonde told AFP.

He said the chemical was found in offals and hooves which Zambeef imports from Europe.

It is prohibited for use as a food preservative in Zambia.

"Formaldehyde is in a group of [aldehydes](#) and is a compound mainly used in embalming corpses for preservation," he said.

A medical doctor, Robert Mtonga, said prolonged exposure to the chemical could cause organ cancers.

"Among the acute effects of formaldehyde exposure are irritations of the eyes, the nose, and the throat," he told AFP.

But "there is also some evidence that constant formaldehyde exposure increases the chances of developing certain forms of [cancer](#)," he said.

Incidences of lung and nose cancer appear to be "significantly" higher among people who are regularly exposed to the chemical, said the doctor.

The health minister said cabinet will meet to decide on sanctions to be imposed on Zambeef, one of the country's largest employers.

Phone calls to Zambeef's officials went unanswered on Friday.

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Citation: Beef sold in Zambia contained harmful chemical: govt (2013, July 19) retrieved 8 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-07-beef-sold-zambia-chemical-govt.html>

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