

China orders dairy firms to renew permits

BEIJING, CHINA: China has ordered dairy firms to apply for new production licences this year in a move designed to improve product quality and safety in the scandal-hit industry, state media said on Thursday, 6 January 2011.

The move comes in the wake of a deadly 2008 health scare sparked by the discovery that the industrial chemical melamine had been widely and illegally added to milk products to give it the appearance of a higher protein content.

Firms, including baby formula makers, that fail to obtain new permits will be forced to close, the official Xinhua news agency said, citing the head of the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine.

"The requirement aims to improve quality and safety in the dairy industry," Zhi Shuping, the quality supervision minister, told a conference in Beijing.

In 2008, melamine was found in the products of 22 Chinese dairy companies, including Synutra, Yili and Mengniu, in a massive scandal blamed for the deaths of at least six infants and for sickening 300,000 others.

The discovery led to a worldwide recall of Chinese dairy products and lingering public fears at home about food quality.

The government said at the time it had destroyed all tainted milk powder and gave the all-clear, but reports melamine-laced products have regularly re-emerged since then.

In July, authorities in China said they had found 25,000 tons of milk powder tainted with melamine.

Reports of tainted red wine, bleached mushrooms, fake tofu, dyed oranges and rice noodles made with rotten grain have all surfaced in the past few months, again touching off consumer concerns about product safety.

Source: AFP