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Press Release

www.consumersfiji.org

Substandard food items sold in the Western Division a concern.

The Consumer Council of Fiji Lautoka Office is calling on traders to adhere to the Food Safety Regulations 2009 due to the significant increase in the number of complaints on sub-standard food items by the Council's office in the Western Division.

In one of its recent cases, a consumer bought a packet of fruitcake for her family's afternoon tea, only to find mold and fungus on the cake. In another incident, the consumer found human hair in her bread, after she had consumed half of it. This is of grave concern to the Council, as complaints on substandard food items are significantly increasing in the West. For the total number of complaints received in 2009, complaints on food items was rated the third highest, with 25 registered cases.

In addition to the complaints, Council's regular market surveillance of supermarkets and shops in 2009 also recorded 34 cases of substandard food items. These discoveries ranged from sale of dented and damaged canned and pre-packed food, sale of expired products, presence of weevils and other insects in food such as flour, rice, semolina and noodles, rotten fruits and vegetables and food products with misleading content or ingredient information.

What further disturbs the Council is that complaints of substandard food is not restricted to supermarkets and shops but also includes food sold in restaurants. The Western Division has seen an increase in number of complaints on dirty and unhygienic restaurants selling substandard food. These restaurants have no proper food warmers or back covering, the utensils used and rest rooms are filthy and smutty, in some cases the tiles on the floor have thick black dirt fillings in between while the food is cold and stale with flies fluttering around the warmers. Complaints received on dirty and unhygienic restaurants were ranked the fourth highest with 6 cases in the 2009 Market Surveillance Report, which is yet again a worry for the Council.

The Council's Lautoka Office has noted that many consumers in the Western Division are not attentive and alert while out shopping, thus the high number of complaints received. Therefore, Council is urging consumers to be more vigilant and observant when shopping for the family. Consumers are advised to check the expiry date and the information available on the product content, especially for food items. Consumers are also advised to gaze around first before deciding and confirming which supermarket to shop from. Most importantly, consumers are urged to lodge their complaint with the Council if they are dissatisfied with a particular product or trader.

The Council is reminding traders and retail outlets that the Food Safety Regulations 2009 which came into effect on October 14 2009, has clearly identified standards on the quality of food items that must be sold and it prohibits the sale of damaged or expired goods. If traders continue to breach the laws, they are liable to face a maximum fine of \$2000 or 12 months imprisonment.

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Premila Kumar
Chief Executive Officer