

A Health & Safety Kaizen

By James Meng

Branding, Chemicals, & Law



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AFLEVERBON

6044255 TOYOTA MOTOR EUROPE NV/SA

**NADJA WILLEMS
INDUSTRIETERREIN 11
BE-3290 DIEST (WEBBEKOM)**

Afdeling : **105 STARTPEOPLE - SMALL PARTS**
Distributiepunt : 1 Standaard distributiepunt
Afleverpunt : 3 WH3
Uw Contactpersoon : nl-helmond1@elis.com

Route : 513 513
Stop / ContNr : 22 /
Lijn : Lijn 3
Bonnummer : 243660278
Jaar/week : 2022 / 13
Leverdatum : 01-04-2022
Productiedatum : 25-03-2022
Ingepakt door : Christa Romeijn

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- Toyota-branded clothing is provided to staff on behalf of Toyota through subcontractors:
 - Toyota engages staffing firms (e.g., Start People)
 - Staffing firms handle clothing orders & assignment of identifying marking/chipping of clothes by the nearby Netherlands filial of the subcontractor, **Elis**
 - Most of my clothes appear to have been stocked and used previously by other people (multiple stickers)

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- The Toyota-branded clothing provided to me appears to have been prepared with a flame retardant, probably a polybromide biphenyl
- This is normal in some industrial environments
- What was definitely not normal, was the use of a spot treatment of excessive amounts of this substance at the black sleeve cuffs of both the short-sleeve shirts and of the jackets

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- *No communication of a need to wash this clothing immediately before use was ever communicated to me in any internationally-recognized language*



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- Most flame retardant chemicals are highly toxic
- The side effects are mostly the same
 - Short term: immunocompromisation; reduced fertility; various dermatological effects dependent on gender, hormonal levels, skin/hair type & pigmentation, etc.
 - Medium term: accelerated aging of all body systems
 - Long term: cancer

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- Most governments (EU included) have guidelines about what defines acceptable exposure levels to these chemicals via a variety of routes
- It is safe to say that in the matter of the spot treatment I experienced that these levels were exceeded, significantly, due to the efforts of someone who had malicious intent:
 - no one at our warehouse works near an open flame

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- My Experience
 - By the end of my first day – *just nine hours* – in the new work clothes, I had developed chemical acne on my right wrist and on my left arm just above the elbow
 - By the time I had arrived at home, I also had initial indicators of having developed a minor sinus infection
 - By the next morning I had developed chemical acne on my chin
 - Realizing what was happening, I washed all of the new clothes immediately
 - The symptoms subsided over the next week and I recovered

Observations

- Foreign brands face a wide range of challenges in assessment and decision-making with regard to local suppliers – not just in procurement but in staffing
- Poisonings are fairly common in Flanders – e.g., Nov-Dec 2021 contamination of many light beers and inexpensive red wines by multiple distributors with an antiquated antidiabetic drug that causes nearsightedness as a result of thickening of the vitreous fluid in the eye
- While the Flanders police do not typically accept reports about poisonings except in extreme cases, laboratories (especially in Wallonia, e.g., the University of Liège) will still do the bloodwork

Observations

- Despite the expense of such bloodwork, and the fact that it is only rarely reimbursable by insurance companies, there are a few easy surface-level reactive skin tests that can be done to assess whether one is suffering from exposure to certain families of flame retardant chemicals
- *The ease of conclusively identifying whether or not one has effectively been poisoned means that staff poisonings are therefore something that remains quite dangerous and inadvisable for a foreign brand to be associated with*

Conclusions

- Assess contractors and subcontractors:
 - Has this problem been encountered previously?
 - Any patterns in when, where & with whom it occurs?
 - What does the staffing contractor say?
 - What does the clothing subcontractor say?
 - What level of risk is associated with this?
 - Should Toyota inform local law enforcement & its insurer?
 - What conclusions need to be made about supplier relationships? Are these isolated criminal matters (e.g., a rogue employee at a supplier) or a larger-scale problem?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION