

Environmental Risk Management Authority New Zealand logo

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Ngā Kaiwhakatūpato Whakararu Taiao

ERMA New Zealand makes meths safer

10 January 2007

Methylated spirits bought over the counter from 21 June 2007 will no longer contain the poisonous substance methanol.

ERMA New Zealand Chief Executive, Rob Forlong, says methylated spirits (meths) containing ethanol denatured with up to 2 per cent methanol, has been available to the public for decades as a cleaner, solvent and fuel.

However, concerns raised for years by coroners, medical practitioners, social workers and the public about damage to the health, and in extreme cases death, of people drinking meths as an alcohol substitute had prompted ERMA New Zealand to reassess the substance.

"The result has been the decision that only formulations of methylated spirits without methanol should be available for sale to the public," Mr Forlong said.

Current stocks of methylated spirits containing methanol would be phased out over the next six months, and would be no longer available to the public over the counter from 21 June. Sales of methylated spirits containing methanol to industrial users would not be affected.

Even though meths would be safer after 21 June, it remained a hazardous substance, Mr Forlong said.

"Meths should continue to be kept out of the reach of children, and medical help sought immediately if it is accidentally drunk."

Mr Forlong said Chemical Injury Surveillance Reports prepared by ESR for the Ministry of Health attributed the deaths of three people in 2002-03 to drinking methylated spirits, while a total of 24 poisonings involving meths were recorded in Auckland City, Hutt, Wellington, Kenepuru, Masterton, Grey and Invercargill Hospitals during 2005.

Mr Forlong thanked industries involved in the manufacture and distribution of methylated spirits and retailers for their support during the reassessment process.

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