

To Catch a SIFECs Violator By Karen Wong

There it is again. Another SIFECs violation.

I am referring to point 8.2 of the Code of Ethics on the Sale of Infant Formula Products in Singapore formulated by the Sale of Infant Foods Ethics Committee, Singapore (SIFECs), commonly known as the "SIFECs Code" which states:

"There will be no point-of-sale promotion to induce sales at the retail level – these include special displays, shelf labelling, price-off offers, discount coupons, premiums such as hampers and gift packs, and tie-in sales for products within the scope of this Code."

About a month ago, I found NAN 1 placed together with other discounted items at my neighbourhood supermarket. This week, I found S-26 with a "Best Buys" tag below it. Both items were being tagged at their regular prices. The consumer, however, was given the impression that there was a special price offered to them.

I suspect that such SIFECs violations are not rare and that this is the most common one. Supermarkets are not aware of the SIFECs Code or that the Code also applies to them. Milk companies are ever ready to push their products. They are quite happy when supermarkets take the initiative to portray their products attractively to consumers, even though they know that such an action is in violation of the Code. It also points to a lack of impetus in us as a consumer group to stop such violations.

As the breastfeeding group in Singapore, the BMSG(S) seeks to support, promote and protect breastfeeding. One way is for us members to watch out and act on such simple violations.

What can we do about it? You don't have to be on a special mission to look out for violations. On your next trip to the supermarket, go by the baby formula section. You will find at least 10 brands of formulae displayed there. Look at those for babies from birth to six months. There should be no special tags associated with them. If you find them labelled with a discount tag or a tag which gives the impression of a special offer, you have found a SIFECs violation **. It is then time to take action.

There are other similar forms of violations. All of them do not give a discount but attract the consumer to the display by some other means. End-of-Aisle display is one. In such a case, a brand of formula is found at the end of a supermarket aisle. Similarly, another is to place a brand of formula among other items which are on special for the week. Or, an attractive tag is placed below the shelf to call attention to the brand.

Once a SIFECs violation is found, you may call Rita Shantilal on 4353689 or fax 4383605. She is the SIFECs Project Officer in the Department of Nutrition, Ministry of Health.

With our force of more than 300 members, I hope our efforts to protect breastfeeding will, in some small way, be strengthened.

*Karen Wong is the BMSG(S)'s representative to SIFECs. SIFECs members are appointed by the Ministry of Health comprising representatives from the Neonatology Departments of SGH and KKWCH; Food Control Department, ENV; Nursing Division; Family Health Services and private hospitals. If you wish to discuss SIFECs violations, you may call Karen on 258 3379.

** Although Scope of the Code applies to "...infant formulae (for infants from birth to six months) and any other food recommended for use as partial or total replacement for breast-milk...", the Ministry of health will monitor sale of formulae and food for infants (i.e. birth to six months) only.

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