

Statement to the National in response to questions concerning Plasmafire International, Ozonifier Industries and Saul Pressman:

The Competition Bureau is examining the information that you brought to our attention to determine whether there has been a contravention of the *Competition Act*.

The Bureau takes all allegations of fraudulent or misleading claims very seriously. In several cases where we have found evidence that consumers were being misled by deceptive health claims, we have taken action.

In March 2008, we launched Project False Hope, an enforcement and education initiative targeting cancer-related health fraud online. As part of this enforcement action, the Bureau reviewed hundreds of websites and contacted the dozens of companies found to have questionable websites. Over 95 per cent removed or amended the websites to remove the potentially misleading information.

In February 2009, the Bureau announced that an Edmonton-based company, Bioenergy Wellness Inc., had agreed to issue refunds to customers and to stop making claims the Bureau alleged were deceptive regarding products used to treat or prevent cancer. The Bureau has ongoing and active investigations related to other deceptive health claims in Canada.

As part of its efforts to help ensure that Canadians do not fall victim to false or misleading health claims, the Bureau has developed a number of resources for consumers, including an interactive tool entitled "Anatomy of an Online Health Scam" and an online Health Fraud Awareness Quiz. The Bureau actively encourages all consumers to be smart shoppers, by asking questions and taking precautions when agreeing to purchase any goods or services.

If consumers feel they have been the victim of this type of activity, they should contact the Competition Bureau toll-free at 1-800-348-5358, or go to www.competitionbureau.gc.ca.

Additional Background Information:

Consumers that shop online need to take extra precautions when they are unable to verify the truth about health claims. They should be sure to:

- remember that trademarks, logos, guarantees, testimonials, and contact information can be easily falsified on a Web site - a little research goes a long way;
- verify the contact information by calling the vendor and requesting information on the business and services offered;

- scrutinize unrealistic product descriptions or cheap bargain claims. Remember, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is;
- examine the testimonials placed on the Web sites and check against the claims made by the vendors;
- avoid money transfers and direct debit, which are some of the scam artists' favourite tools;
- Refrain from disclosing personal and banking information through emails; and
- pay using a secure Web site or payment service.

Here are some tips for spotting scams:

- Beware of ads that promise too much.
- Think twice before buying a product that claims it can do it all.
- Steer clear of a product that claims to be a "scientific breakthrough".
- Genuine scientific discoveries make front-page news. If the first or only place you learn about a new treatment is through an advertisement on the Internet, be suspicious.
- Keep your guard up when ads mention scientific evidence.
- Ads that are long on technical jargon may be short on proof. The presence of a doctor in an ad is no guarantee the product works. Scam artists have been known to dress models to look like experts.
- Don't be swayed by a questionable "success story" or so-called "patient testimonial".
- Despite what the company claims, there's no guarantee that "John Doe of Hometown, Canada" has achieved the advertised results, or is even a real person.
- A money-back guarantee is no proof that a product works.
- Scam artists who offer a guarantee have been known to "take the money and run".
- Consult your health care practitioner before trying any new treatment.
- A doctor, nurse, or health care professional who knows your medical condition is your best source of information

For more information regarding deceptive health claims, we encourage consumers to consult the wealth of information on this subject available on our Web site, such as:

- The Competition Bureau Health Portal: http://www.competitionbureau.gc.ca/eic/site/cb-bc.nsf/eng/h_02704.html
- Project False Hope: <http://www.competitionbureau.gc.ca/eic/site/cb-bc.nsf/eng/02614.html>
- Combatting Cancer Fraud Pamphlet: <http://www.competitionbureau.gc.ca/eic/site/cb-bc.nsf/eng/03082.html>
- Anatomy of an Online Health Scam: <http://www.competitionbureau.gc.ca/eic/site/cb-bc.nsf/eng/02580.html>
- Health Fraud Awareness Quiz: <http://www.competitionbureau.gc.ca/eic/site/cb-bc.nsf/eng/02568.html>
- Miracle Cure for Diabetes? <http://www.competitionbureau.gc.ca/eic/site/cb-bc.nsf/eng/02214.html>.

Multimedia Collaborations:

- In 2005, the Competition Bureau collaborated with the U.S. Federal Trade Commission to launch "FatFoe", an educational teaser site aimed at informing consumers of weight-loss scams on the Internet: The tool is available at: <http://wemarket4u.net/fatfoe/>
- The FTC and the Competition Bureau also partnered to develop "Glucobate, the all-natural diabetes breakthrough" a fake Web site intended to illustrate common online scam techniques. The tool is available at: <http://www.wemarket4u.net/glucobate/>