

Voluntary Guideline: Legibility of the Cautionary Message in Consumer Health Product Advertising (October 2010)

INTRODUCTION

This voluntary guideline is intended to help marketers of consumer health products and advertising agencies develop broadcast advertisements for consumer health products with a cautionary message that is legible and comprehensible to the public (for example, messages such as “*This product may not be right for you. Always read and follow the label directions*”).

Consumer Health Products Canada’s Marketing Committee developed the following criteria for a minimum size, contrast, and duration on-screen of the cautionary message to ensure its legibility within broadcast advertisements. It was felt that if the following criteria are met, the ad creative would be meeting the spirit and intent of the requirements in Section 2.21 of the *Consumer Advertising Guidelines for Marketed Health Products*. Consumer Health Products Canada members should be implementing these criteria according to the timelines found within the guideline in order to achieve optimal legibility of their cautionary message in broadcast advertising.

CRITERIA FOR OPTIMIZING LEGIBILITY

1. DURATION

The super must appear onscreen for minimum of 3.5 seconds. Actual duration at or above the 3.5 seconds will be determined by a number of factors, including number of scenes the super appears on, complexity of background, etc.

2. SIZE

In a standard definition image, the type should be a minimum of 14 scan lines high.

3. FONT

A sans serif font is required for maximum legibility.

4. CONTRAST

The type should be a light colour over a predominantly dark background or a dark colour over a predominantly light background. Opacity should be set at 100% and the kerning set at 0. A drop shadow could also be used to aid legibility.



TRANSITION PLAN

Given the large number of broadcast advertisements currently in circulation which do not meet the criteria set within this voluntary guideline, it is necessary to outline a transition plan for CHP Canada members and other marketers who choose to utilize this guideline to come into compliance.

As of **October 1, 2010**, CHP Canada members should be using the cautionary message criteria within this voluntary guideline for the development of any new broadcast advertising for consumer health products. Any advertising currently on air or in circulation which does not meet the cautionary message criteria listed within this guideline should be phased out, by **March 1, 2011** at the latest. However, existing advertisements developed before September 1, 2010 which falls within 80% of the minimum size and duration criteria may continue to run until their normal use cycle is complete.

CHP Canada will conduct the cautionary message audit among members on an annual basis to track compliance to the agreed upon criteria within this voluntary member guideline for improving legibility of the cautionary message in consumer health product advertising. The next scheduled cautionary message audit for CHP Canada members is **April 2011**.

SUMMARY

This voluntary guideline is intended to help marketers of consumer health products and advertising agencies develop broadcast advertisements for consumer health products with a cautionary message that is legible and comprehensible to the public. Consumer Health Products Canada members are encouraged to implement these suggestions in order to achieve optimal legibility of their cautionary message in broadcast advertising.

CHP Canada understands the need to set startup markers to measure and track improvements within future audits of the cautionary message. Therefore based on the above criteria, and as of our inaugural audit date of April 2010, CHP Canada member broadcast advertisements were **below the minimum criteria** set within this guideline for **67%** of all member ads on size, and **29%** of all member ads on duration. Blinded annual audit results will be shared with the general membership, Advertising Standards Canada, and Health Canada upon request.

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