

Hidden Hero Hits Half Century

Bitrex® Celebrates 50 Years

For immediate release 4 September 2008

This month, one of this country's unsung heroes reaches its 50th birthday. Bitrex®, the most bitter substance known to man, is a bittering agent found in thousands of products in the UK and abroad. Its exceptionally bitter taste helps make everyday household products so unpalatable that it's almost impossible to swallow them. In its 50 years, the additive has silently saved untold lives and prevented countless serious injuries.

Bitrex® has its origins in the best tradition of British invention and innovation. The product was the brainchild of a research department at Macfarlan Smith and was discovered in 1958 during the development of a new local anaesthetic. It is exported from Edinburgh all over the world. Bitrex® is added to products which range from slug baits to retailers' own label detergents, and from anti-freeze to anti-nail biting products.

Bitrex® is typically added to products at milligram concentrations, being detectable at levels as low as 50 parts per billion. A teaspoon full of Bitrex® would still be tasted in an Olympic sized swimming pool. Even with these tiny amounts, it is a sign of their success that every year Macfarlan Smith sells tonnes of the product globally.

Roger Kilburn, Managing Director, of Macfarlan Smith said, "Over the past 50 years, Bitrex® has been used to make a huge variety of harmful products unfit for both human and animal consumption. So as a brand, Bitrex's longevity is a source of great pride. However, we are most proud of its application as a deterrent to accidental poisoning. Due to its overwhelmingly bitter taste, we feel it is ideal as part of the three tier system of defence, along with proper storage and childproof caps, to help prevent accidental poisonings. With this in mind, we are proud to be the longest running commercial sponsor of Child Accident Prevention Trust's child safety week.

The half-century is no time to rest on our laurels, though. We're committed to expanding Bitrex® sales throughout the world as a leading brand in child and pet safety."

Katrina Phillips, Chief Executive of the Child Accident Prevention Trust, added: "30,000 children are rushed to casualty each year because it's thought they've swallowed something poisonous, with the under fours at greatest risk. Products should be stored out of reach and sight of young children. And child-resistant tops are a good thing because they're harder to open quickly – but they're by no means completely childproof. That's why a bittering agent like Bitrex® plays an important role in helping to reduce accidental poisoning".

Bitrex® is committed to supporting all aspects of child safety. Bittering agents are a key development in preventing accidental ingestion. Safe storage and childproof tops are equally important but Bitrex provides that all-important, last line of defence.

Roger Kilburn of Macfarlan Smith concluded 'Thanks to increased awareness and technical improvements like Bitrex®, the world is a safer place for children than it was 10 years ago. But with so many children in the UK still suffering from accidental poisoning, there is no room for complacency.'

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Contacts

Ali O'Neale, Cloudline PR
0131 220 7114
07889016094

Martin Raymond, Cloudline PR
0131 220 7114
07710008831

Notes for Editors:

1. Denatonium Benzoate was discovered in 1958 by Macfarlan Smith and registered under the Bitrex trademark in the United Kingdom, Canada and the USA later the same year. First used in denaturing alcohol - making it legally unfit for consumption - it is now added to a wide range of household cleaners, pesticides, and DIY and automotive products. Since being approved in the UK and US in the early 1960s, Bitrex has been officially recognised as the denaturant of choice in more than 40 countries.

It is inert and odourless, meaning it doesn't affect the product performance other than making it exceptionally bitter

UK sales began in 1960, and by 1963, customers included I.C.I, Rentokil and Avon Products. The first use of Bitrex simply as a taste aversive was in a cream to prevent tail biting in pigs.

Bitrex® has been used in a variety of applications since. One of the main uses is as a human aversive. Due to its overwhelming bitter taste, it is ideal for helping prevent accidental poisonings. Many supermarkets in the UK and Europe use the Bitrex® logo on their products as a selling point to their customers.

2. Research was carried out by Swift Research with customers at five leading supermarket chains in late 2007 and early 2008. The majority of interviews were carried out outside supermarkets and the remainder online. 976 people were interviewed, 88% were female, only 9% had no child at home, 74% were weekly supermarket shoppers, the majority were working parents and in social class terms the sample closely reflected the national profile.

3. If you suspect your child has ingested something they shouldn't have, please phone NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 (England & Wales) or 08454 242424 (Scotland)

4. Take the Bitrex taste test – try Bitrex out. Taste cautiously with tongue and see why it's possible to detect Bitrex in an Olympic size swimming pool at levels as low as 50 parts per billion