

MEDIA RELEASE

Change for our Children

Embargoed to: 4:00 p.m. Monday 14 February 2011

Advertising standards and imagery of sleeping babies

A recent ruling by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) sends a strong message that **imagery of sleeping babies** used in advertising and other media content, must align with health recommendations if it is to also meet ASA ethical standards for social responsibility.

Recently, the ASA upheld a complaint against Puraz Health for a television advertisement that opened with footage of a sleeping baby lying face down on a sheepskin. The advertisement played on TV One, had been prepared for Puraz Health by Admarkit Limited and approved by the Commercial Approval Bureau (CAB). All four agencies demonstrated **low awareness** of the safety issues for young babies when they sleep.

The ASA found that the advertisement was **in breach** of Basic Principle 4 of their Code of Ethics which states that *'All advertisements should be prepared with a due sense of **social responsibility** to consumers and to society.'* Specifically, the ASA ruled that it was **in breach** of Rule 12 of this principle which states that *"Advertisements should not, unless justifiable on educational or social grounds, contain any **visual presentation** or any description of dangerous or illegal practices or situations **which encourage a disregard for safety.**"*

Change for our Children director, Stephanie Cowan, who filed the complaint with the ASA, said that the decision was a timely **'wake-up call'** for the **entire industry** that supports advertising: from photo stock agencies, design and marketing teams, magazine and website editors, and television networks, to advertisement approval bodies themselves such as the CAB.

“It is more than 20 years since the breakthrough finding that **position of sleep is critical to a baby’s survival** in the developmentally vulnerable first six months and thousands of New Zealand children are alive today because they slept on their backs as babies,” said Cowan. “Given the strength of the evidence that back sleeping is protective, for anyone to sleep a baby in any other position is to take a chance with that baby’s life. Likewise, to promote images of babies sleeping in any other position, weakens the recommendation and encourages risk-taking.”



Change for our Children is a health-funded agency working to prevent sudden infant death. The group recently published results of an assessment of images on New Zealand baby product websites and parenting magazines¹. The study found that of the 64 images of asleep babies studied, **60% were of babies in non-recommended sleeping positions and environments**. Babies were shown sleeping on the side in 16%, on the front in 13% and with potential for suffocation or overheating in 58% of images (from soft surfaces, head covering, pillows and loose items).

“We work to support parents to act with safety during the critical first months when a baby’s responses to breathing and temperature challenges are still maturing,” said Stephanie Cowan. “As babies become more mobile, they can get into dangerous situations they cannot yet escape from, or deal with. A safe sleeping position and environment supports babies through this time of development.”

There are more than 60 sudden and unexpected deaths of babies every year in New Zealand and unsafe sleeping contexts is a factor for most. Babies exposed to smoking during pregnancy are more vulnerable than other babies, but all babies need to be on the back, with a clear face and open airway, and smokefree when they sleep, every time and in every place that they sleep. ‘Imagery that aligns with these principles supports parents to act with safety for their babies,’ said Cowan.

¹

http://www.changeforourchildren.co.nz/files/docs/review%20of%20internet%20images%20report_web_upload.pdf

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Attached:

Advertising Standards Authority Decision (Complaint 10/659)