



EYE SAFETY

Broadening Usage of the "Eyedrop Container" — A Cause of Injuries?

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The familiar plastic "eyedrop" container is increasingly used to package certain non-pharmaceuticals. In certain cases, this has no adverse consequences. In other instances, however, user confusion culminating in eye injuries results when contact lens cleaning solutions, antiseptics, disinfectants, in-vitro diagnostic reagents, eyeglass cleaning liquids and other similarly packaged potentially injurious products are mistaken for common ophthalmic pharmaceuticals by distraught users.

Examples of packaging similarities are included in Figure 1; popular cylindrical plastic dropper containers developed for eye and ear medication are shown opposite a selection of "mimic" packages containing substances which embody variable degrees of hazards if placed in the eyes.

In the office and clinic, as well as in the home, many of these products are often found near one another. For example, baby vitamin suspensions, oral medications, ophthalmic pharmaceuticals, and similarly packaged diagnostic reagents are often placed on the same shelves of pediatric clinics; contact lens solutions, eyedrops and eyeglass (lens) cleaning liquids are commonly seen on optometrists' and ophthalmologists' desks; home medicine cabinets may contain all of those products and other consumer items of similar appearance. Therefore, it should not be surprising that serious injuries can result from user mistakes in selecting packages. Although the product labelling cannot be faulted and the user is clearly to blame, there is no doubt that packaging similarities contribute to such accidents, in particular with container configurations and colours associated with familiar ophthalmic preparations.

"Mimic" container errors appear to be related to perceptual, associative or pattern recognition peculiarities of superficially uniform objects. Perhaps some rethinking is needed in this class of

container systems. Some time ago, effective tamper-proof and child resistant containers resulted from discussions and cooperation between the health products packaging industry, the pharmaceutical associations, the safety agencies, various government bodies and standard writing organizations. A similar approach could be taken for the "mimic" containers.

Recent problem reports addressed to the Bureau of Medical Devices of the Department of Health and Welfare by consumers and health professionals suggest that one ought to be wary of the "mimic" container. Case reports, anecdotes and suggestions in these areas would be welcome from the readership.



Fig. 1

Top Row, Left to Right:

STING-EZE^(R): Mosquito bite compound containing benzocaine and phenol.

DECISION^(R): Control serum for clinical chemistry (biological product of human origin).

PLASTIC LENS CLEANER^(R): Eyeglass cleaning compound containing detergent and isopropyl alcohol.

FECATEST^(R): In-vitro diagnostic reagent containing high concentration of hydrogen peroxide.

Bottom Row, Left to Right:

RED COATE^(R): Dental plaque revealing agent containing biological stain (erythrosine).

PLIAGEL^(R): Contact lens cleaning and wetting agent.

LOCACORTEN-VIOFORM^(R): Antiinflammatory - antibacterial ophthalmic medication.

SODIUM SULAMYD^(R): Antibacterial (sulfa) ophthalmic medication.

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