Cascades launches antibacterial paper towel to counter sloppy handwashing

LuAnn LaSalle-Associated Press

Paper products maker Cascades is looking for new commercial markets with its antibacterial paper towel aimed at cutting down the amount of bacteria spread by hand contact.

Cascades (TSX:CAS) is launching what it calls an "intelligent" antibacterial paper towel that it says compensates for sloppy hand washing in pubic places and business.

The green-coloured paper towel has an antibacterial ingredient that lasts for 30 minutes after hand drying, the Quebec-based company said Tuesday.

The product is targeted at the food-processing and restaurant sectors, medical clinics, schools and daycares, it said.

"This innovation responds to a need for improved hand hygiene that is frequently cited by public health experts in recent years," said president and CEO Alain Lemaire.

It's not destined for grocery stores at this time and is only for the Canadian market until the company gets approval to market it in the United States and Europe.

Cascades said it has been working on the product for five years and views it as a new market niche that will grow. It costs about 15 to 20 per cent more than other paper towel products and it's made from 100 per cent recycled fibres.

Consumers are asking for more environmentally friendly paper products and companies have been responding. Cascades' competitor Kruger Products has launched its own versions of eco-friendly tissue products.

RBC Capital Markets analyst Paul Quinn said Cascades's new paper towel is for commercial and industrial use, adding the market could be substantial.

"You don't use the same kind of product in your home as you do in the office," Quinn said.

"They've definitely positioned their product to be green. They've always been leaders on the environmental side," Quinn said of Cascades.

However, Quinn said Cascades' antibacaterial paper towel is likely to attract its major North American competitors like Procter & Gamble, Kimberly-Clark and Georgia Pacific in North America to come out with similar products.

Cascades brand of eco-friendly toilet paper had about six per cent of the Canadian market in 2009, up from 2.5 per cent four years ago. Sales have increased nearly fivefold to $45 million. Sales of Cascades' fine paper environment brands have increased to $81 million from $16 million in 2006.

Cascades said it has added antibacterial ingredient benzalkonium chloride, used in hand and face washes, to the paper towel. It maintains the ingredient reduces the amount of bacteria left on hands after drying and protects them from "subsequent bacterial contamination."

The H1N1 pandemic has forced Montreal-based Noveko International Inc. (TSX:EKO) to increase production again for its hand sanitizer and antimicrobial masks to meet global demand.

Infectious diseases expert Allison Aiello said she's not convinced antibacterial paper towels are a necessity — noting there's nothing wrong with using just soap and water.

But Aiello said most people do not wash or dry their hands properly or for long enough.

"Sing the 'Happy Birthday' song twice and make sure you get between your fingers and under your fingernails," said Aiello, professor in the University of Michigan's School of Public Health in Ann Arbor.

Aiello said the ingredient benzalkonium chloride isn't effective against certain types of bacteria, including some of the hardier ones.

"I would be a little bit hesitant in championing something like this, because of the fact that this ingredient is not a broad spectrum antimicrobial," she said.

She also said there have been studies linking its antimicrobial ingredient benzalkonium chloride to some antibiotic resistance.

If people aren't washing their hands properly, "then maybe you should be using the alcohol-based hand sanitizers," Aiello said.

Shares in Cascades closed up nine cents at $6.52 Tuesday on the Toronto Stock Exchange.

Source URL (retrieved on *03/09/2014 - 4:38pm*):
http://www.mdtmag.com/news/2010/05/cascades-launches-antibacterial-paper-towel-counter-sloppy-handwashing