



Joanne Kearsley
Deputy Chief Coroner of England and
Wales
Senior Coroner, Manchester North
HM Coroner's Court
Newgate House

07 April 2025

Dear Ms Kearsley,

Regulation 28: Prevention of Future Deaths Report

Carla James

Thank you for sharing your Regulation 28 Report to Prevent Future Deaths, dated 7 February 2025, following your investigation into the death of Ms Carla James, that you concluded is likely to have been caused by the deliberate ingestion of toxic [REDACTED]. I am responding on behalf of the Department for Business and Trade, in my role as Chief Executive of the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS).

I was very sorry to hear of Ms James's death. If you have the opportunity, please pass on my deepest sympathies to her family and friends.

The OPSS, within the Department for Business and Trade, is the UK's product regulator, responsible for the regulation of most consumer products, while the regulation of plants and seeds in relation to plant health and UK biosecurity is led by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

The UK's product safety laws require that consumer products placed on the market must be safe. In most cases, primary responsibility for ensuring that only safe consumer products are placed on the UK market lies with the producer (which can mean importer in certain circumstances). In addition, distributors of products must not supply products they know, or should know, are unsafe.

I understand that the relevant product in this case was a package of natural, dried [REDACTED], from a species of tree native to Southeast Asia and Australasia. The product purchased by Ms James was sold by a home interiors business, as a decorative home accessory.

In the absence of any sector-specific safety regulations applying to the product, it may fall to be governed under the General Product Safety Regulations 2005 (GPSR). The GPSR are broad regulations designed to ensure the safety of consumer products sold, both online and offline. They cover manufactured products, that are intended for consumers. In determining the safety of a product under the GPSR, regard is given to the presentation of the product, including its labelling and any warnings and instructions for use. If the product is within scope of the GPSR, then the producer



(which can include importers) or distributor of the product should have considered the risks posed and determined whether a warning label, or other actions, would have mitigated those risks. Unfortunately, OPSS does not have any evidence regarding the product's packaging that would enable us to determine whether such warnings were present in this case. I am aware that the high-street retailer from whom Ms James purchased the product has now stopped stocking the item.

OPSS officials have discussed this case with counterparts in the Department of Health and Social Care's (DHSC) suicide prevention team. DHSC has advised that ingestion of toxic plant products, including seeds, is a known method of suicide and they have previously sought advice from the Department's Concerning Methods Working Group on action to address risks from plant-based toxins. This group works to raise awareness of, and prevent access to or misuse of, harmful substances.

The group involves representatives from the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, the police, the NHS, and Government departments including DBT. It gathers intelligence about methods of suicide to assess whether certain causes are prevalent or may be a growing trend. It then develops and delivers targeted actions to reduce public awareness and access to emerging methods of suicides, engaging with relevant Government departments where they may be able to help achieve this. DHSC officials have advised that this case will be discussed at the group's next meeting, and any actions shared with OPSS.

I know that you have also written to the Defra Secretary of State. OPSS has met with Defra officials to discuss the regulatory position on plants which are toxic or contain toxic seeds. They have made OPSS aware of the UK Horticultural Trade Association's *Guide to Potentially Harmful Plants*, the latest version being published in 2022. It sets out guidelines for the voluntary labelling of plants (including bulbs and seeds) to inform the public of potentially harmful plants at the point of purchase and prevent unintentional ingestion. The species in this case is listed as a specialist category B plant, with the suggested labelling 'Toxic if Eaten'. However, there are no specific legal requirements for plant labelling in relation to human safety.

Going forward, OPSS will continue to engage with Defra, DHSC and other stakeholders, so that we can assess whether this tragic case has wider implications for the regulation of this or similar products in future.

Thank you again for writing to OPSS on this matter. I would be grateful if you could share a copy of this letter with colleagues who may find it useful.

Kind regards,



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