

# Expert warns against cheap vitamins

## Canadian supplement regulations ensure quality, says researcher

By KATHERINE DEERYNA  
*Times Colonist staff*

Canadians are taking a chance on their health by trading their strong dollars for cheaper dietary supplements across the U.S. border, says B.C. vitamin expert Lyle MacWilliam.

Canada has some of the toughest regulations in the world, he says, while the U.S. lets the industry regulate itself — "a regulatory loophole that you could drive a Mac truck through."

Health Canada demands that supplements meet pharmaceutical-style standards, while the U.S. Food and Drug Administration lets manufacturers classify supplements as food — a much less rigorous standard.

"There is a real cause for concern when it comes to U.S. products — there's a lot of room for error," says MacWilliam, a biochemist and former M.L.A. and M.P. who was among the experts who developed new regulations that went into force in 2004 at a cost to the federal government of \$40 million.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Food and Drug



**Lyle MacWilliam has written a comparative guide to nutritional supplements.**  
*Ray Smith/Times Colonist*

Administration has the mandate to regulate supplements, but lets the industry regu-

late itself, he says. "As a result of that there are many products in the U.S. market that are inferior products, that are even unsafe products," he says. "That is my cautionary note to people that may be shopping south of the border."

Many U.S. food-grade quality products have been found to be contaminated by heavy metals, insect parts and animal feces, he warns.

A panel of the U.S. National Institutes of Health raised serious concerns about the situation in 2006.

"The current level of public assurance of the safety and quality of MVMs (multi-vitamin-minerals) is inadequate, given the fact that manufacturers of these products are not required to report adverse events," it said.

Furthermore, "the FDA has no regulatory authority to require labelling changes or to help inform the public of these issues and concerns."

MacWilliam has watched people many times as they study vitamin labels and has found they often choose the cheapest. Hence his concern about cross-border supplement shopping.

Canadian regulations were revamped to ensure quality and safety control for vitamins and minerals that had been sold as drugs; herbal products that had been sold as food-grade products; and many combinations of the two.

Even in the late 1990s, Health Canada inspectors were finding herbal products contaminated with insect parts, moulds, fungal toxins and animal feces.

MacWilliam makes his living in the supplement field. He's author of *Nutrition Research Comparative Guide to Nutritional Supplements*, which rates more than 1,600 nutritional supplements based on label claims. Less than one per cent meet his five-star level, with many major brands receiving only one or two stars.

He's concerned that many multi-vitamins contain only minimum amounts for maintaining the body as opposed to optimum amounts to ward off degenerative diseases.

He rates products on 18 criteria from potency and purity to potential toxicity and inflammation control.

Only four of 35 top-ranking manufacturers of broad-spectrum supplements with anti-oxidants agreed to pay for independent lab testing of their label claims. Some of the top-rated supplements from those four makers include:

Vitalize Formulas for men, women and senior women's by Creating Wellness Alliance

Ultra Preventative IX and X by Douglas Laboratories

TrueBASiC by TrueStar Health  
CA Essentials and US Essentials by USANA Health Sciences.