

# Contraceptive sponge not available in Canada

by Jackie Kaiser  
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**WATERLOO, Ont.** — The contraceptive sponge, a new method of birth control for use by women, is an inexpensive, convenient, over-the-counter method that was introduced to the United States market last July. In Canada, however, the Health Protection branch has rejected the application of the VLI Corporation that manufactures the sponge, and the sponge will not be available in Canada unless they can present more satisfactory evidence.

The Today brand contraceptive is a small, round polyurethane sponge treated with the spermicide nonoxynol-9. The dampened sponge is to be inserted into the vagina before intercourse, and can be left in place for 24 hours. It may be removed using the attached ribbon six hours after intercourse.

"So far, they (VLI) have not

been able to provide us with evidence" that would merit the approval of the sponge for the Canadian market, said Jean Battar, spokesperson for the Health Protection branch. The VLI application was rejected last fall, she said.

Although the details and problems of the submission are confidential, Battar noted that use of the sponge has been associated with cases of toxic shock syndrome in recent weeks.

And while the decision to reject the VLI's proposal was made well before the link with toxic shock was established, "this more or less backs up our decision," she said.

"I wouldn't want the thing out there," said Battar.

Although the sponge has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug administration, it is acknowledged that two common carcinogens exist in small amounts in the spermicide. The manufac-

turer has responded to criticism of the sponge's safety by noting that tests have not yet been able to detect the presence of the carcinogens; if they do exist, then they seem to be present at very low levels.

Other doubts about safety include the possibility of cervical irritation with continued use. To date, however, no significant connection between sponge use and irritation has been established by tests.

Controversy has arisen recently about a link with toxic shock syndrome and deformations in babies born to long-time sponge users but more intensive studies in coming years will be necessary before a causal relationship can be established.

According to the manufacturer's advertisements, the effectiveness of the Today sponge in preventing pregnancy is "in the same range as the diaphragm." One clinical study reported in the

January issue of Ms. Magazine has, however, raised doubts about this claim.

The study, done in the United Kingdom and Canada, indicated a failure rate for the sponge of 27.1 per cent — significantly higher than the 10.8 per cent failure rate of the control group that used the diaphragm method. However, this failure rate was based on the 48 hour use of the Today sponge and

not the currently recommended 24 hour use.

Advantages over the diaphragm include ease of insertion and 24 hour effectiveness without reapplication of spermicide. The cost of each sponge — about \$1 in the U.S. — makes the method about as expensive to use as the diaphragm. There is no odor or taste to the spermicide.

## Nestle boycott over

**CALGARY (CUP)** — The six-year international boycott of Nestle products is over, at least temporarily.

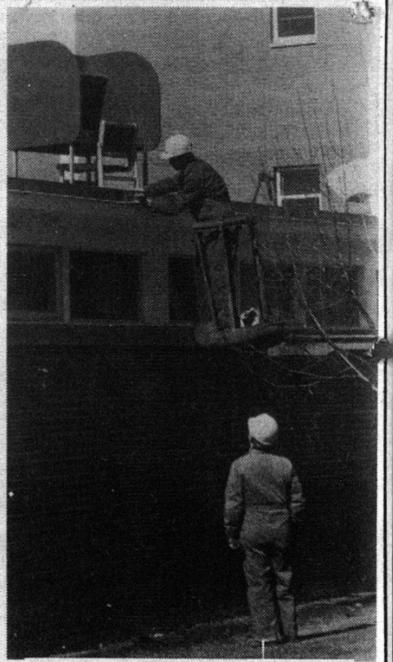
The International Boycott Committee made the announcement recently, after saying its campaign against marketers of baby formula in the Third World had made important gains.

Nestle Corp. was the main

company targeted by the campaign because of its aggressive marketing techniques aimed at Third World mothers. INFACT, the Infant Formula Action Committee, charged Nestle with encouraging new mothers to give up breast feeding unnecessarily for formula, exposing infants to serious health risks and possible death. INFACT said mothers became dependent on the formula after they stopped breast feeding, and with poor sanitary conditions, improper use and lack of funds, the formula is often diluted or contaminated.

In 1981, Nestle agreed to abide by the World Health Organization's guidelines, which recommended government enforcement of WHO aims, protection and promotion of breast feeding and providing information on the proper use of breast milk substitutes.

INFACT says it is not completely satisfied with Nestle's actions, but feels an important goal of the campaign was accomplished. It may reinstate the boycott if conditions deteriorate in the future.



Ah, now that spring is here... One student thought it would be fun to study outside on the roof of the Faculte St. Jean. These two workmen had a different idea.

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