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New Research and Education Resources to Protect Vietnamese Consumers from Adulterated and Counterfeit Alcohol Health Risks

Hanoi –At a workshop held at Hanoi Medical University (HMU) today, the Institute for Preventative Medicine & Public Health at Hanoi Medical University (IPMPH-HMU) and the Methanol Institute (MI) announced the results of a three-month, intensive research study on knowledge, attitude and practice among Phu Tho Community about alcohol and methanol poisonings. The organizations and Bach Mai Hospital’s Poison Control Center (PCC) also launched a methanol education web site in Vietnam.

A/Prof. Le Thi Huong, Director of IPMPH and Director of the Vietnam Methanol Education Project (VMEP), commented, “This research study has given us an extensive understanding of stakeholder awareness about alcohol and methanol poisonings in Phu Tho Province. The data results will allow us to structure medical and community education initiatives which are most effective at improving long-term public health in Phu Tho and throughout Vietnam.”

Vietnamese consumers face critical public health risks from in-advertently consuming methanol through improperly-brewed homemade spirits, methanol-laced counterfeit beverages, and legitimately-produced spirits adulterated with methanol. Such risks are largely preventable with proper enforcement, consumer education, and training for the medical community.

Methanol is one of the most widely-used chemical commodities in the world and is a building block for hundreds of products that touch our daily lives -- from building materials and car parts, to plastics and paints. It is also being used safely and increasingly in a number of energy applications ranging from transportation fuel for vehicles and marine vessels, to fuel cells, industrial power generation, and as a cooking fuel source. Likely many other chemicals and fuels, methanol is not meant for human consumption.

IPMPH-HMU conducted research in urban and rural communes within two districts in Phu Tho Province. The study found that while respondents had general knowledge about the health effects of alcohol consumption, very few knew about methanol or the health risks of consuming adulterated beverages and/or improperly-brewed, homemade alcohol (which can result in methanol being produced during the brewing process). Most healthcare providers, homemade alcohol producers, and regulators surveyed also lacked sufficient knowledge of methanol poisoning causes, diagnoses, and treatment methods.

PCC’s new methanol education web site (<http://methanol.chongdoc.org.vn/>) provides extensive information about methanol, its safe use and global applications. The site also details how adulterated alcoholic beverages can be harmful to human health, how consumers can protect themselves from accidentally ingesting methanol, and steps consumers and medical experts should take in the event of a suspected methanol poisoning.

The World Health Organization (WHO)’s *Methanol Poisoning Outbreaks* fact sheet (http://www.who.int/environmental_health_emergencies/poisoning/methanol_information.pdf) shares important tips consumers should undertake to protect themselves. These include: refrain from purchasing or producing illegal alcoholic drinks; be suspicious about alcoholic drinks offered for sale in informal settings that are not licensed to sell alcohol (e.g. market stalls), and/or

alcohol that is offered at a very cheap price; do not buy alcoholic drinks sold in unlabeled containers; check branded products for labels that are poorly printed or with typographical errors, or bottles with broken seals (do not buy these, as they might potentially contain counterfeited or adulterated alcohol content); be aware of the symptoms of methanol poisoning, and seek medical attention immediately.

These initiatives are part of Vietnam Methanol Education Programs (VMEP) funded by the Methanol Institute (MI), run and managed locally by HMU-IPMPH and PCC, with advisory support from The LIAM Charitable Fund in Australia.

Dom LaVigne, MI's Director of Government & Public Affairs (Asia Pacific/Middle East), provided the following comments, "MI and the methanol industry are proud to be supporting this important initiative. HMU's research study and PCC's important resources are important first steps toward providing reliable information and treatment options to protect Vietnamese consumers from the risks of adulterated and counterfeit alcoholic beverages."

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About the Methanol Institute

The Methanol Institute (MI) serves as the global trade association for one of the world's most vibrant and innovative industries. Founded in 1989, MI represents methanol producers, distributors, and technology providers in every corner of the globe – from our headquarters in Singapore and regional offices in Washington, D.C., Brussels, and Beijing. MI takes the responsible stewardship of methanol very seriously and works actively with stakeholders worldwide to share resources about methanol-poisoning prevention. More information on methanol poisoning, detection, and prevention can be found in the "Health and Safety" section of MI's web site at <http://methanol.org/Health-And-Safety/Poisoning-Prevention.aspx>.

About HMU and IPMPH

Hanoi Medical University (HMU) was established in 1902 and is one of Vietnam's leading universities, as well as a leading medical education institution among the country's eight medical universities. For many years, HMU has been a focal point for networking and disseminating innovations in medical education and medical research. Since 1945, HMU has trained about 18,000 doctors for the healthcare system and about 10,000 post-graduate students, who have played important roles in the health care system.

The Institute for Preventive Medicine and Public Health (IPMPH) is one of the largest academic units within HMU, and has had over 50 years of experience in training and research on preventive medicine and public health. Over the past 20 -- with support from the Swedish and Dutch governments and academic institutions -- HMU and IPMPH faculty have built extensive expertise in health system research, and public health research and evaluation. Faculty members have been working closely with The United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) implementers such as FHI and Abt Associates in implementing teaching, evaluation and research activities.

PCC is a division of Bach Mai Hospital, a tertiary general hospital with approximately 2,000 beds. The hospital is a public teaching hospital. The department of clinical toxicology or poison treatment center (PTC) was separated from the department of emergency and intensive care of Bach Mai Hospital in 1998. From this treatment center, the PCC of Bach Mai Hospital was established in 2003 and has been working as the only national PCC.

About The LIAM Charitable Fund

Lifesaving Initiatives About Methanol (The LIAM Charitable Fund) was founded by Tim and Lhani Davies following the death of their son Liam in the Gili Islands, Indonesia in January 2013 as a result of methanol poisoning from adulterated alcoholic beverages.

The Charity's main objectives are the development of methanol-related educational, training, and awareness initiatives within local Indonesian communities, tourism sector, and the healthcare system. LIAM has provided extensive advisory support to assist MI, IPMPH, and PCC in developing the VMEP in Vietnam.

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