

CANADIAN FEDERATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN  
AURORA NEWMARKET CLUB

# BACKGROUND REPORT

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FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER

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## FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER

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One of the harmful effects of alcohol consumption is referred to as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). According to a Fact Sheet<sup>1</sup> produced by the Government of Canada, FASD is a general term that describes the range of disabilities that may affect a child if the child's birth mother drank alcohol while she was pregnant. FASD is a major cause of preventable birth defects and the leading form of developmental delay in North America. FASD is not in itself a diagnosis. The possible diagnoses within the range of disabilities include:

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)

Partial FAS (pFAS)

Alcohol-Related Neuro-developmental Disorder (ARND)

Alcohol-Related Birth Defects (ARBD)

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## INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS TO DECREASE THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL

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In a recent report from the World Health Organization<sup>2</sup> (WHO), "*Global health risks: mortality and burden of disease attributable to selected major risks.*" 2009, alcohol contributes to more than 60 types of disease and injury (p.21). The WHO drafted a strategy<sup>3</sup> to reduce the harmful effects of alcohol in February 2009, and the United Nations passed Resolution WHA63.13 at the Sixty-Third World Health Assembly in May, 2010 endorsing a global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *What is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder?* Fact Sheet, Government of Canada, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> *Global Health Risks: Mortality and burden of disease attributable to selected major risk factors.* Geneva, World Health Organization, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> *Draft Global Strategy To Reduce The Harmful Use Of Alcohol.* World Health Organization, Executive Board 126th Session, Geneva, 18–23 January 2010

<sup>4</sup> Resolution WHA 63.13, *Global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol*, World Health Assembly, May 2010.

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## BACKGROUND ON GOVERNMENT OF CANADA AND FASD<sup>5</sup>

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Since 1987, four Standing Committees on Health; the Royal Commission on New Reproductive Technologies; the National Advisory Committee on FASD; and, Private Members' Bills in 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1999, have all recommended comprehensive strategies on FASD.

In 1996, sixteen national health and allied associations identified the use of alcohol during pregnancy as a "national health concern" and committed to identifying and implementing prevention strategies to reduce incidences of FASD.

In 1999, the Government of Canada created the National FASD Initiative. The intent of the three year initiative was to further develop Canada's knowledge and expertise on FASD by building on existing programs, services and experiences of national and local health and allied professional organizations, parenting / caregiver associations, provinces and territories, and Aboriginal communities.

In September 2000, the Government of Canada and Provincial/Territorial (P/T) governments reached an agreement on Early Childhood Development (ECD), in which the Government of Canada dedicated approximately \$500M annually to support the P/T governments in early childhood development programs and services. Consistent with the agreement, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and the Yukon have designated FASD as a priority and have continued to invest in FASD programs and services.

In 2002, the Government of Canada further committed to FASD under the five-year, \$320M Federal Strategy on ECD for First Nations and Other Aboriginal Children, in which the Government of Canada invests approximately \$15M annually to support the development of prevention and early intervention measures for First Nation communities; enhance training for service providers; develop practical screening tools and improve parent/caregiver supports for affected families.

<sup>6</sup>In 2002, the former Population and Public Health Branch of Health Canada initiated a strategic planning process and a series of consultations on FASD with Provincial/Territorial representatives and key stakeholders, including community-based programs and organizations, Aboriginal organizations, parents, caregivers, and other front-line and professional organizations.

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<sup>5</sup> *Backgrounder on the Government of Canada and FASD*. <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/fasd-etcaf/goc-bg-eng.php>

<sup>6</sup> *Health Portfolio Involvement in Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)*, Fact Sheet, Government of Canada, 2007.

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## FASD: A CANADIAN FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

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In Canada these consultations led to the development of *FASD: A Framework for Action*<sup>7</sup> by the National Advisory Committee on FASD and the Interdepartmental Working Group on FASD. The Framework has five broad goals:

1. **AWARENESS:** Increase Public and Professional Awareness and Understanding of FASD and the Impact of Alcohol Use During Pregnancy.
2. **CAPACITY:** Increase capacity to identify and meet the needs of children, youth, adults and families affected by FASD, as well as women who may use alcohol during pregnancy.
3. **DIAGNOSIS:** Create Effective National Screening, Diagnostic and Data Reporting Tools and Approaches.
4. **EVIDENCE:** Expand the Knowledge Base and Facilitate Information Exchange.
5. **COMMITMENT:** Increase Commitment and Support for Action on FASD.

One of the key building blocks of prevention of FASD is building awareness and knowledge of FASD, and its lifelong impacts on individuals, families and communities.

In a national survey for Health Canada<sup>8</sup> Environics reported that,

“There is overwhelming approval, overall, of a number of initiatives to provide information about the risks of alcohol use during pregnancy. Strong approval continues to be higher for government sponsored advertising (78%) and warning messages on alcohol advertising (71%), especially compared to that for requiring warning signs in restaurants (45%). Women are more likely than men to strongly approve of all the initiatives tested” p.5.

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<sup>7</sup> *FASD: A Framework for Action*. <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/fasd-fw-etcaf-ca/intro-eng.php>

<sup>8</sup> *Alcohol Use During Pregnancy And Awareness Of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome And Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder*, Environics Report for Health Canada, May 2006.

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## **CFUW RESOLUTIONS ON FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME - 1993**

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In 1993 the CFUW passed the following Resolutions related to:  
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome - Impact of Consumption on Fetal Health

Keywords: Alcohol/Drugs | Children | Health | Health Care |  
Reproduction/Pregnancy | Women

RESOLVED, That the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) urge the provincial and territorial governments to encourage educators and health care professionals to advise the general population that individual alcohol consumption patterns of individuals can adversely affect fetal development and female health;

RESOLVED, That CFUW urge provincial and territorial governments to direct all appropriate institutions to standardize their curricula to include the above resolved clause in all programs related to educators and health care professionals;

RESOLVED, That CFUW ask the provincial and territorial governments to urge doctors to include alcohol consumption patterns as part of a patient's medical history and report to the appropriate authorities, statistical details regarding reproductive abnormalities that might be related to alcohol consumption, and such ministries to promote the posting of warning signs to prevent fetal alcohol syndrome in all places where alcohol is sold or consumed; and

RESOLVED, That CFUW urge the Government of Canada to legislate labeling requirements on all alcoholic beverage containers indicating the potential teratogenic effects of alcohol on sperm and egg cells as well as on the developing fetus.

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## **FASD AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS**

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A report<sup>9</sup> from Public Health Canada, suggests that FASD awareness campaigns:

- *are one component of a broader plan to address FASD.*
- *should be connected to other FASD strategies.*

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<sup>9</sup> *What we have learned: Key Canadian FASD Awareness Campaigns*, Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006.

- *are defined as goal-oriented attempts to positively influence a specific audience, through an organized set of activities that take place in a specific time period.*
- *have the potential to influence levels of awareness, knowledge and attitudes, encourage information-seeking behaviour's on how to make change, indicate where to get services, and clarify, remind, reinforce and encourage people who already know the facts.*
- *With sufficient exposure, an awareness campaign can result in changes in risk behaviour (p.17).*

This report suggests, "...There are differences between raising awareness about FASD and promoting other health practices. Alcohol use in pregnancy may be based in addiction and/or other health and social issues, and can lead to an infant with a distinct disability, rather than general poor health or injury. Women may need support and services, as well as information, to change their alcohol use. Fear-based strategies in FASD campaigns can appear to be victim blaming, or discriminatory of individuals with disabilities such as FASD. Fear-based strategies also risk producing reactions such as anger, denial, defensiveness and avoidance. Humour-based strategies can be seen as mocking or blaming pregnant women, or as insensitive to the underlying factors related to alcohol use in pregnancy." p.17.

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#### **DID YOU KNOW .....**

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1. Beverage alcohol is the only consumer product in Canada known to cause harm if misused that does not alert the consumer to that fact.
2. FASD is the leading cause of development delays in North America.
3. Health Canada estimates that 9 in every 1,000 babies in Canada are born with FASD.
4. Health Canada recommends that there is no safe time or safe amount of alcohol to drink while pregnant or planning to become pregnant (this includes both parents).
5. The primary symptoms of FASD include growth deficiency before and after birth, central nervous system dysfunction and deformities in the face and cranial area.
6. The secondary symptoms of FASD relate to quality of life:
  - 90% have mental health problems
  - 60% will be expelled, suspended or drop out of school
  - 60% will get into trouble with the law
  - 50% will exhibit inappropriate sexual behavior

- 30% will abuse drugs or alcohol
  - 80% will not be capable of living independently
  - 80% will have employment problems.
7. Federal and provincial authorities estimate that as many as **50% of the inmates in the prisons** of Canada suffer from alcohol related birth defects.
  8. FASD is 100% preventable but incurable. The cost to Canadian taxpayers to care for children diagnosed with FASD is estimated at \$1 to \$2 million per child, depending on the severity of the case.
  9. An estimated 4,000 new cases each year translates into \$4 billion annually.
  10. Canadian distilleries currently place health warning labels on bottles destined for the US and other markets.

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## **FASD IN ONTARIO**

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There are approximately 130,000 Ontarians who suffer with FASD.

Based on a cost of \$1million per person, this is a total cost of \$1.3 billion.

Ontario is the only province that does not have a government-led FASD strategy.

On Sept. 9, 2010 (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Awareness Day), the FASD Ontario Network of Expertise released three research papers and called for a provincial strategy. [www.fasdontario.ca](http://www.fasdontario.ca).

According to research done by Best Start Resource Centre using Environics studies, warning labels on alcoholic beverages were considered very effective. (Best Start, Implications for Ontario: Awareness of FASD, 2007)

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## **CFUW INITIATIVE TO PROMOTE WARNING LABELS ON ALCOHOL PRODUCTS**

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The current CFUW interest in promoting the labeling of alcohol products with warnings about the effects of alcohol consumption on maternal and fetal health is consistent with the goal of the national initiative with respect to awareness of the risks of alcohol consumption. It is an additional way of keeping the issue in the

public eye, and is consistent with the message from other educational sources such as physicians and clinics.

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## **RATIONALE FOR ACTION ON WARNING LABELS**

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Given that

- a resolution supporting this action was submitted by CFUW Kincardine and became policy at the AGM in 1993.
- this issue has been debated in the House of Commons (39<sup>th</sup> Parliament, May 14, 2007)
- it has already been adopted by the United States, Portugal, Spain, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Mexico, Brazil, Costa Rica, Armenia, Iceland, Guatemala, Honduras, Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.
- it is supported by Health Canada, the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Nurses Association, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Canada, the Canadian Paediatric Society, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the Canadian Police Association, and the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs.

**It is now time to act.**

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## **FASD - POLICY CHRONOLOGY IN CANADA AND THE PROVINCES REGARDING WARNING LABELS ON ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES**

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*Beverage alcohol is the only consumer product in Canada that is known to cause harm if misused that does not alert the consumer to that fact.*

*Fetal alcohol syndrome first appeared in medical literature in 1968 when a French doctor, Paul Lemoine, published the first studies he had observed in children born to mothers described as alcoholics.*

*FAS went largely unrecognized until 1973, when it was characterized as a 'tragic disorder' by Seattle physicians Jones and Smith.*

## **Canada**

***"This initiative of having health warning labels on the containers of alcoholic beverages is not a recent subject in Canada. It was first raised in 1976 by the then Minister of Health, the Hon. Marc Lalonde." - Hon. Paul Szabo, Mississauga South, Liberal, to The House of Commons – December 1995***

Note: \* In the USA labels were mandated in 1989.

**1992** Health Sub-Committee issued a report ***Fetal Alcohol Syndrome - A Preventable Tragedy***. Warning labels were recommended. During the hearings, the Brewers Association of Canada and the Association of Canadian Distillers were the only witnesses opposed to warning labels.

\* Many Canadian firms at that time, and presently, manufactured products for US markets with warning labels.

**1993** Under Federal Health Minister Bouchard, \$65,150 was appropriated for the initial phase of a warning labels pilot project. Before the project started, Mr. Bouchard was replaced and the project was scrapped.

**March 25, 1994** Mrs. Anna Terrana (Vancouver East), House of Commons: "Mr. Speaker, Ms. Dawn Gardner is a Saskatchewan health journalist who is concerned about alcohol abuse on the part of pregnant women.

Fetal alcohol syndrome is defined as a random pattern of mental, physical and behavioural defects which may develop in the unborn child when the mother consumes alcohol during the course of her pregnancy. A pregnant woman never drinks alone.

Canadian estimates of children affected by fetal alcohol syndrome are over 36,000 yearly. These statistics tell us that over 50 per cent of these children become wards of the state. The same percentage will need corrective surgeries while many will suffer from blindness, deafness, epilepsy and most frequently mental retardation.

The government must take some responsibility for this situation and make sure that measures are taken to educate people by labelling all bottles of alcohol, posting signs, introducing health programs in the schools, et cetera.

Our youth is our future. Our children are the leaders of tomorrow. Let us spare them."

**February, 9, 1995** Pursuant to Standing Order 93(1), the House proceeded to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of Mr. Szabo (Mississauga

South), seconded by Ms. Boivin (Gatineau), — That **Bill C-206, An Act to Amend the Food and Drugs Act** (warning labels regarding the consumption of alcohol), be now read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Health.

**March 6, 1995 Bill C-222**, an act requiring warning labels on alcohol containers, passes first reading in the House of Commons. It is referred to a subcommittee of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health for public hearings. The bill subsequently dies on the Order Paper.

**June 20, 1995** Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce **Bill C-337, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act** (warning on alcoholic beverage containers). He said: Mr. Speaker, in the interests of the health of all Canadians we often use warning labels on items such as cigarettes, antihistamines, cleaners, bags and other items which may affect the health of Canadians. This does not apply to alcoholic beverages and this bill seeks to have a warning label, particularly with relation to the problem of foetal alcohol syndrome and the ability of all of us to operate machines and cars while under the influence of alcohol.

**December 7, 1995** Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.) moved that **Bill C-337, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act** (warning on alcoholic beverage containers) be read the second time and referred to a committee. He said: Mr. Speaker, beverage alcohol is the only consumer product in Canada known to cause harm if misused that does not alert the consumer to this fact.

**Thursday, December 7, 1995** – Hon. Paul Szabo, Mississauga South, Liberal, to The House of Commons: "This initiative of having health warning labels on the containers of alcoholic beverages is not a recent subject in Canada. **It was first raised in 1976 by the then Minister of Health, the Hon. Marc Lalonde.** In 1992, as I mentioned earlier the House of Commons standing committee on health and welfare recommended warning labels to the government.

How do current legislators feel? On May 23, 1995 the B.C. Minister of Health wrote the following to the federal Minister of Health: "I am writing to you in regards to alcohol warning labels. This was a topic of our discussion at the provincial, territorial ministers of health meeting held in Vancouver April 10 and 11, 1995. There was unanimous agreement that warning labels should be pursued by the federal government".

See the following website:

<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?pub=Hansard&doc=273&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=35&Ses=1#17412>

**October 1997 Bill C-231, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act** (warning labels regarding the consumption of alcohol) receives First reading

For 12 consecutive years, (still checking dates)

**March 1998 - Bill C-383, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act** (warnings on alcoholic beverage containers) receives First reading.

**2000** Hon Paul Szabo, Liberal MP for Mississauga South writes a book entitled FASD: The Real Brain Drain, explaining details of FASD and advocating alcohol warning labels.

**2003** Government of Canada publishes *FASD: A Framework for Action*

**November 1, 2004** Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. In the last Parliament we dealt with a motion on fetal alcohol syndrome, more specifically to consider the advisability of health warning labels on the containers of alcoholic beverages.

The vote on the motion was 220 to 11, a 95% support level by members of Parliament. Would the Minister of Health please advise the House of his position on this important child health initiative?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder is a very serious issue that occurs as a result of prenatal exposure to alcohol. This issue causes a lot of damage across the country and has social, economic and other consequences for all Canadians. I am predisposed to looking at the issue.

The hon. member has worked on the issue very hard for a long time. I want to ensure that we deal with the issue in the very near future by doing the right thing.

**February 7, 2005** The House resumed from November 24, 2004, consideration of the motion that **Bill C-206, An Act to Amend the Food and Drugs Act** (warning labels regarding the consumption of alcohol), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**March 2005** CCSA and the Public Health Agency of Canada co-hosted two National Thematic Workshops on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder as part of a series of broad consultations to prioritize FASD issues of national significance. The FASD workshops aimed to achieve consensus on a variety of recommendations and priorities and to build and strengthen national partnerships within the FASD community. As a result of the consultations, Addressing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) was identified as one of the 13 priorities of the National Framework for Action to Reduce the Harms Associated with Alcohol and Other Drugs and Substances in Canada.

**March 21, 2005** Paul Szabo, Liberal MP for Mississauga South puts forward **Bill C-206 An Act to Amend the Food and Drugs Act** (alcohol warning labels) but it is

turned down in the House April 7, 2005 with the statement that “The implementation of Bill C-206 will cost the federal government significant dollars to implement and maintain.”

**May 3, 2006** The first reading of **Bill C-251, An Act to Amend the Food and Drugs Act** (warning labels regarding the consumption of alcohol) introduced by Paul Szabo, Liberal MP for Mississauga South.

**September 2006** The Standing Committee on Health publishes ***Even One Is Too Many: A Call FOR A Comprehensive Action Plan For Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder***

**May 14, 2007** Paul Szabo, Liberal MP for Mississauga South moved that **Bill C-251, An Act to Amend the Food and Drugs Act** (warning labels regarding the consumption of alcohol), be read the second time and referred to a committee. At this point, Mr. Szabo noted that he had been working on the FASD issue for more than 12 years.

**December 12, 2007** Pursuant to Standing Order 93(1), the House proceeded to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of Mr. Szabo (Mississauga South), seconded by Mr. Thibault (West Nova), — That **Bill C-251, An Act to Amend the Food and Drugs Act** (warning labels regarding the consumption of alcohol), be now read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Health. The question was put on the motion and it was negatived on the following division: YEAS: 91, NAYS: 163

**June 7, 2010** **Bill C-532 An Act to Amend the Food and Drugs Act** (warning labels regarding the consumption of alcohol) is put forward by Thunder Bay-Rainy River, New Democratic Party MP John Rafferty.

**September 30, 2010** **Bill C-569 The National Strategy for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder** is put forward by Thunder Bay-Rainy River, New Democratic Party MP John Rafferty.

## **THE PROVINCES**

**Alberta - October 2010** Calgary-East MLA Moe Amery proposes to bring forward a motion in fall session or when the spring session begins in February, calling for the government to mandate labels on alcohol similar to those found on cigarette packages, warning about the potential dangers of drinking.

**British Columbia - September 2003** published ***Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: A Strategic Plan for British Columbia***. Currently there is a strategic 10 year plan in place which covers 2008-2018.

**Manitoba - June 14, 2007 - Bill 201 The Liquor Control Amendment Act (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Prevention)** was presented by Liberal MLA Kevin Lamoreux. The Bill did not proceed to second reading.

**June 4, 2008** - Manitoba Liberal Leader Dr. Jon Gerrard called on the government to implement preventive FASD measures, which would save tax payers millions of dollars annually, by supporting the Liberal bill to place warning labels on alcoholic products.

According to the Minister of Healthy Living there are approximately 200 children annually diagnosed with FASD in Manitoba at a lifetime cost of \$2 million per child.

**Ontario - 2005 Bill - 43, "Sandy's Law"** came into effect in Ontario, requiring licensed establishments to post specific warning signs about the risks of alcohol use in pregnancy.

**April 2009** Kenora Miner and News and [www.whitecrowvillage.org](http://www.whitecrowvillage.org) Kenora lawyer Doug Keshen has served the federal government and the Liquor Control Board of Ontario with a \$1.8 billion lawsuit, demanding that labels be placed on liquor bottles warning women of the dangers of drinking while pregnant.

**Yukon and Northwest Territories** - Yukon and the Northwest Territories have required liquor stores to provide warning labels on all bottles of wine and spirits as well as on packaged beer since **1992**.