



July 8, 2020

Alex Gorsky
Chairman & Chief Executive Officer
Johnson & Johnson
One Johnson & Johnson Plaza
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Dear Mr. Gorsky:

Black Women for Wellness and the nearly 200 organizations from 51 countries around the world representing a broad coalition of health and environmental justice, women's and health-affected groups, write to request that Johnson & Johnson (J&J) commit to fully removing its talc-based baby powder from the global market, in North America *and* abroad, and end the company's targeted marketing to Black women and other historically marginalized communities.

Together, we are international, national, state, and local organizations united by a shared interest in lifting up the voices of women and other individuals who are not invited into consumer safety and health policy discussions, even as they have been disproportionately impacted by the failures of the current system of cosmetic industry self-regulation.

On May 19, J&J announced it will discontinue selling its talc-based Baby Powder in the U.S. and Canada, while allowing existing inventory to be sold in stores until it runs out. The company said it plans to continue selling the talc-based products in markets around the world.¹

This halfhearted announcement represents a baby step toward the kind of meaningful commitment needed by J&J to protect Black women, and women everywhere, from the serious health risks associated with exposure to asbestos-contaminated talc-based baby powder. Documents produced during J&J litigation revealed the company was aware since the late 1950s that the talc used in Johnson's Baby Powder sometimes contained asbestos.²

Citing evidence from these documents, a Missouri appeals court just last week ordered J&J and a subsidiary to pay \$2.1 billion in damages to women who claimed their ovarian cancers were caused by the company's talc-based products. The trial "showed clear and convincing evidence defendants engaged in conduct that was outrageous because of evil motive or reckless indifference," the court said, according to a New York Times report. "A reasonable inference

¹ Johnson & Johnson, *Johnson & Johnson Consumer Health Announces Discontinuation of Talc-based Johnson's Baby Powder in U.S. and Canada*. J&J website. <https://www.jnj.com/our-company/johnson-johnson-consumer-health-announces-discontinuation-of-talc-based-johnsons-baby-powder-in-u-s-and-canada>.

² Girion, Lisa; Reuters, *Johnson & Johnson knew for decades that asbestos lurked in its Baby Powder*. Dec. 14, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/johnsonandjohnson-cancer/>



from all this evidence is that, motivated by profits, defendants disregarded the safety of consumers despite their knowledge the talc in their products caused ovarian cancer.”³

Instead of warning consumers about possible health risks, internal J&J documents show that your company instead doubled down on aggressively marketing its talc-based baby powder to women of color, distributing free samples in Black churches and advertising on Spanish-language radio.⁴ An internal J&J memo from 1992 acknowledged the potential links to cancer, while simultaneously recommending increased marketing to African American and Hispanic women.⁵

In the United States, there are approximately 22,000 new cases of ovarian cancer and 14,000 deaths due to ovarian cancer each year. While J&J’s decision to stop selling its talc-based Baby Powder in the U.S. and Canada will reduce millions of potentially harmful exposures, its intention to keep marketing the product internationally and sell down current inventory in North America will continue to disproportionately negatively impact Black and Brown people.

In the wake of uprisings across America and internationally, in response to the unjust police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and hundreds of other Black men and women, your company and a number of other companies have publicly acknowledged the leadership of Black Lives Matter and have made superficial commitments to racial equity.⁶

The work of equity and justice must go beyond mere statements of “solidarity.” For manufactures especially, this must be demonstrated by a practice of values. Consumer product companies like J&J must ensure that the products they market are, at the very least, safe. And moreover, they must not engage in discriminatory practices that harm historically marginalized communities. Police brutality is only one of the many injustices faced by Black and Brown people. The systemic injustice of corporate brutality, often not as transparent, yet just as insidious, is also a major issue.

³ Rabin, R. C., New York Times, *Women With Cancer Awarded Billions in Baby Powder Suit*. June 23, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/23/health/baby-powder-cancer.html>.

⁴ Kirkham, C. and Girion, L., Reuters, *As Baby Powder concerns mounted, J&J focused marketing on minority, overweight women*. April 9, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-johnson-johnson-marketing-specialrepo/special-report-as-baby-powder-concerns-mounted-jj-focused-marketing-on-minority-overweight-women-idUSKCN1RL1JZ>

⁵ Berfield, Susan; Feeley, Jef; Cronin Fisk, Margaret, Bloomberg Businessweek, *Johnson & Johnson has a baby powder problem*. March 31, 2016. <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2016-baby-powder-cancer-lawsuits/>. Johnson’s Baby Powder internal memo dated August 5, 1992. https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2016-baby-powder-cancer-lawsuits/img/baby_powder_major_opportunities_and_major_obstacles.pdf

⁶ Gorsky, A., J&J website, *Message from Johnson & Johnson Chairman and CEO Alex Gorsky About Recent Events in the United States*. Johnson & Johnson. June 2, 2020. <https://www.jnj.com/latest-news/a-message-from-johnson-johnson-ceo-alex-gorsky-about-recent-events-in-the-united-states>.



A true commitment to racial equity and justice requires practicing values that are not rooted in systemic racism. While we applaud this decision to stop selling talc-based powder to women and families in North America, we call on the company to practice the values they are proclaiming, to walk their talk, and institute new values of justice throughout the corporation.

We urge your company to halt sales of its talc-based Johnson's Baby Powder worldwide, and to voluntarily recall and safely dispose of its existing inventory in North America.

With great sincerity and much hope,

Janette Robinson Flint
Executive Director
Black Women for Wellness
www.bwwla.org

CC: The Honorable Anna Eshoo, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Debbie Dingall, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Frank Pallone, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Ayanna Pressley, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Jan Schakowsky, United States House of Representatives

Supporting organizations:

Action sur l'Environnement et le
Développement (AED)
Eugène Loubaki
Congo-Brazzaville

ABREA - Brazilian Association of
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Eliezer João De Souza
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Action for Breast Cancer Foundation
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Action on Smoking & Health Philippines
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Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow
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Association Al Sahel pour le pêche maritime
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Association Marocaine Santé, Environnement et
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Coming Clean
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