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Inside C5

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Fifteen dead, up to two dozen missing, after California mudslides

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - Rescue crews with dogs and thermal-imaging equipment searched the hills around wealthy Santa Barbara, California,

on Wednesday for up to two dozen people missing after rain-driven mudslides swept through the coastal community, killing at least 15.
Mudslides damaged historic hotels and the homes of celebrities including Oprah Winfrey, who relish the area sandwiched between the ocean and the sprawling Los Padres National Forest, for its natural beauty and proximity to sprawling Los Angeles.
But the wooded hillsides that once gave their estates a sense of seclusion were largely denuded by last year's historic wildfires, setting the stage for the massive slides that slammed into homes, turned highways into raging rivers and shredded cars into nearly unrecognizable tangles of metal after heavy Tuesday rains.

Between 12 and 24 people who were believed to in the area at the time of the slides remained unaccounted for, said Chris Elms, a spokesman for state firefighters.

About 500 law enforcement officers and firefighters were combing mud-covered neighborhoods, using dogs, helicopters and thermal imaging equipment to locate missing people.

"We are still very much in active search and rescue mode," Elms said in a phone interview. The current death toll of 15 confirmed fatalities could rise, he warned.

"That's a fear, Elms said. "We are still very hopeful that we will locate people alive."

Officials have ordered residents in a large swath of Montecito to stay in their homes so that rescuers can better go about their work.
About 300 people were stranded in a canyon. Local rescue crews, using borrowed helicopters from the U.S. Coast Guard, worked to airlift them out, officials said.
The county initially ordered 7,000 residents to evacuate and urged another 23,000 to do so voluntarily, but only 10 to 15 percent complied with mandatory orders, said Amber Anderson, a spokeswoman for the Santa Barbara County Fire Department.
The slides closed several historic hotels, including The Four Seasons Biltmore, which had just reopened on Monday after repairing damage from the wildfires. The courtyard of the 90-year-old Montecito Inn, built by silent movie actor Charlie Chaplin, was filled with a thick crust of debris driven by the slides.
"There are no customers," said Pierre Henry, owner of the Bree'osh Bakery Cafe Montecito, several blocks from the spot where a large mudslide crossed Coast Village Road as it moved toward the ocean.
"We have a lot of friends of ours, and they are in the other part of Montecito, and they don't have electricity, they don't have gas, water and they don't have internet," Henry added. "We are quite lucky."
The mudslides followed a violent rainstorm that dropped as much as 6 inches (15 cm) of precipitation in pockets northwest of Los Angeles, soaking ground that was left vulnerable after much of its vegetation burned in the state's largest wildfire last month.
Winfrey posted a video on Instagram showing her wading through nearly knee-deep mud on her Montecito property.

Emergency personnel carry a woman rescued from a collapsed house after a mudslide in Montecito

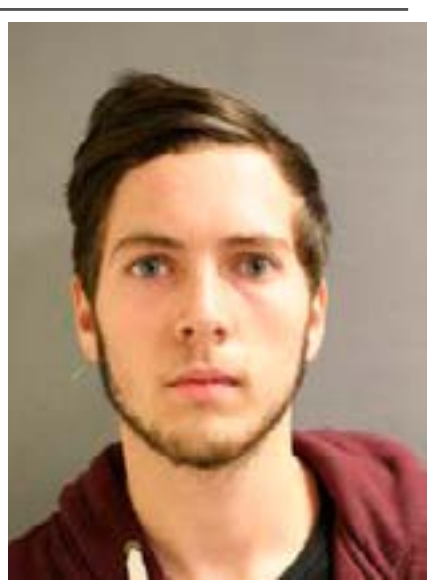
HCSO and Gulf Coast Violent Offenders and Fugitive Task Force Capture Robbery Suspect.

Community

(Harris County, TX) Harris County Sheriff's Office Robbery investigators and Gulf Coast Violent Offenders and Fugitive Task Force members captured 20-year-old Mason Gray on Tuesday , January 9, 2018, at around 6:45 p.m.
Investigators received information he was at a home in west Harris County, and he was taken into custody with incident.
Gray was featured in a extensive media campaign over the last month in order to get tips or information on his location.

HCSO YouTube page highlighted Gray in a Snapchat video that showed him shooting a handgun from a moving vehicle.
Investigators received information from the video to identify Gray as the suspect who two robbed a Valero station's at gunpoint on Wednesday, March 1, 2017, in west Harris County.
At around 12:45 a.m. Gray walks in to the store located in the 2200 block of Fry Road, and looks around the cooler area at energy drinks.
He is seen wearing a light colored shirt and grey colored pants with a tan or light colored baseball hat with POLO on the tab.
He asks the clerk a question and then leaves the store.
Gray re-enters the store again and walks around the store and exits again.
When Gray walks back into the store a third time, he is now wearing a distinctive black colored hoodie with red lettering on the front.
As he approaches the counter , he pulls a tan and brown colored mask over the bottom part of his face and demands the money at gunpoint.
He then fled from the store on foot in an unknown direction.
Gray also robbed a Valero Corner station at gunpoint located in the 22500 block of Franz road that same night.
Anyone with additional information is urged to call the Harris County Sheriff's Office Robbery Division at 713-274-9231.

Crime Stoppers will pay up to $5,000 for information leading to the charging and/or arrest of the suspect in this case. Information may be reported by calling 713-222-TIPS (8477) or submitted online at www.crime-stoppers.org. Tips may also be sent via a text message by texting the following: TIP610 plus the information to CRIMES (274637). All tipsters remain anonymous



Southern DAILY Make Today Different

BUSINESS

Chinese officials have recommended slowing or halting purchases of U.S. Treasuries.

China added to bond investors' jitters this past Wednesday as traders braced for what they feared could be the end of a three-decade bull market.

Officials in Beijing reviewing the nation's foreign-exchange holdings have recommended slowing or halting purchases of U.S. Treasuries, according to people familiar with the matter. Benchmark bonds reversed earlier gains on the news, with the yield on 10-year Treasuries climbing for a fifth day.

China's foreign-exchange reserves of $3.1 trillion are the world's largest, though it wasn't clear whether the recommendations have been adopted. The market for U.S. government bonds is becoming less attractive relative to other assets, and trade tensions with the U.S. may provide a reason to slow or stop buying American debt, the thinking of these officials goes, according to the people, who asked not to be named as they aren't allowed to discuss the matter publicly. China's State Administration of Foreign Exchange didn't immediately reply to a fax seeking comment on the matter.

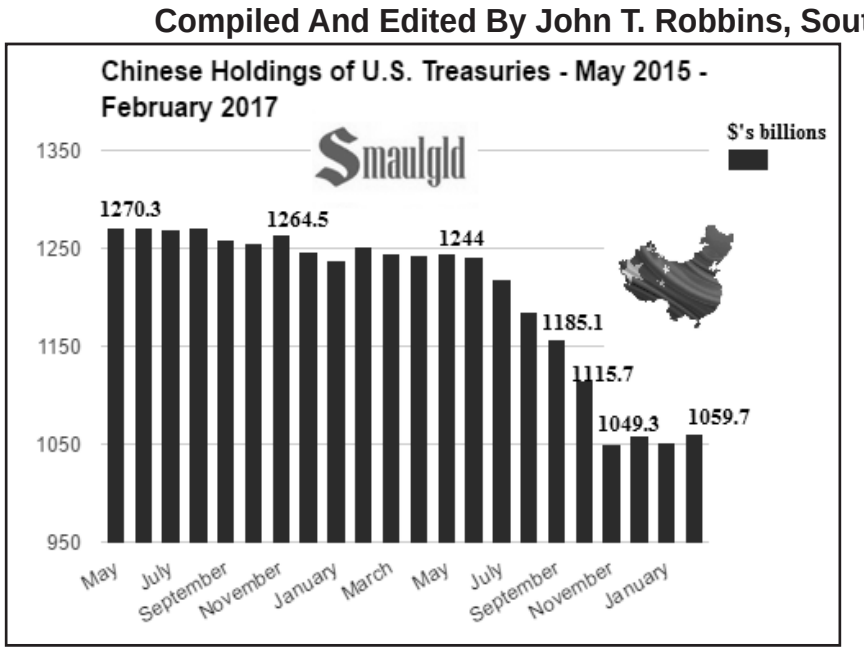
"With markets already dealing with supply indigestion, headlines regarding potentially lower Chinese demand for Treasuries are renewing bearish dynamics," said Michael Leister, a strategist at Commerzbank AG. "Today's headlines will underscore concerns that the fading global quantitative-easing bid will trigger lasting upside pressure on developed-market yields."

The Chinese officials didn't specify why trade tensions would spur a cutback in Treasuries purchases, though foreign holdings of U.S. securities have sometimes been a geopolitical football in the past. The strategies discussed in the review don't concern daily

China Is The World's Biggest Foreign Holder Of U.S. Treasuries

China May Halt Purchases Of U.S. Treasuries

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



purchases and sales, said the people. The officials recommended that the nation closely watch factors such as the outlook for supply of U.S. government debt, along with political developments including trade disputes between the world's two biggest economies when deciding whether to cut some Treasury holdings, the people said.

The yield on 10-year Treasuries was four basis points higher at 2.59 percent as of 12:16 p.m. in London, reversing a decline to 2.54 percent earlier Wednesday. The rate on comparable bonds was one basis point higher at 0.53 percent.

Any reduction in Chinese purchases would come just as the U.S. prepares to boost its supply of debt. The Treasury Department said in its most recent quarterly refunding announcement in November that borrowing needs will increase as the Federal Reserve reduces its balance sheet and as fiscal deficits look set to widen.

"It's a complicated chess game as with everything the Chinese do," said Charles Wyplosz, a professor of international economics at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva. "For years they have been bothered by the fact that they are so heavily invested in one particular class of U.S. bonds, so it's just a question of time before would try to diversify."

Some investors said that the market could take the China news in its stride considering the nation's net purchases of Treasuries have already slowed "significantly."

"If China ceases to be a net purchaser of U.S. Treasuries, this is unlikely to have a significant impact on the overall yield curve unless China divests a large share of its total holdings in a short time period," said Rajiv Biswas, Singapore-based chief Asia-Pacific economist at IHS Markit.

Yields were already climbing this week amid expectations the improving global economy will boost inflation pressures round the world, just as major central banks scale back their asset purchases.

Markets are also braced for a deluge of debt supply this week. The U.S. is scheduled to reopen $20 billion of 10-year debt later today, followed by $12 billion of 30-year bonds on Thursday. Germany sold 4.03 billion euros of 0.5 percent 10-year bonds on Wednesday with syndications in Italy and Portugal to follow. (Courtesy https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles)

Related

U.S. yields rise after China officials said to slow purchases

Traders weigh impact for equities; crude extends gains

Treasuries, Stocks Slump on China as Dollar Falls: Markets Wrap

U.S. stocks fell, Treasury yields rose and the dollar weakened after Bloomberg reported that Chinese officials were said to be wary of American government debt, further roiling a bond market unnerved by a recent selloff.

The 10-year Treasury yield rose toward 2.59 percent ahead of a note auction after senior government officials in Beijing recommended slowing or halting purchases. The news rippled through markets, with gold, euro and

Swiss franc jumping. The S&P 500 Index headed for its first decline of the year, while European equities snapped a five-day rally. The dollar retreated against most G10 peers. West Texas oil rose past $63 a barrel after U.S. government data showed inventories fell.

Reduced asset purchases by the world's top central banks, rising commodity prices and looming U.S. debt sales all support the case for higher bond yields, but until now they have proved resilient. The move in benchmark Treasuries -- into what bond veteran Bill Gross declared a bear market -- has left traders weighing where yields will go from here and what impact the change will have on other assets.

Billionaire bond manager Jeffrey Gundlach forecast in a year-ahead outlook webcast that the S&P 500 will end the year with a negative return after a "pretty decent run" early in the year. Others, including CLSA Ltd. CEO Jonathan Slone, argued equity markets have enough momentum to keep rising.

In Asia, the yen climbed for a second day as traders unwound short positions in the wake of the Bank of Japan paring back purchases of ultra-long dated bonds. China's central bank weakened its daily fixing on the yuan by the most since September, one day after a report showed it has adjusted its currency-fixing mechanism, a move interpreted as an embrace of greater fluctuation in the exchange rate. (Courtesy https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles)

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

A Snapshot Of The World

New York Fire Department crew respond after a fire broke out at Trump Tower in Manhattan, New York

Jordan Jtakin walks though a 5G wireless broadband technology display in the Intel booth during the 2018 CES in Las Vegas

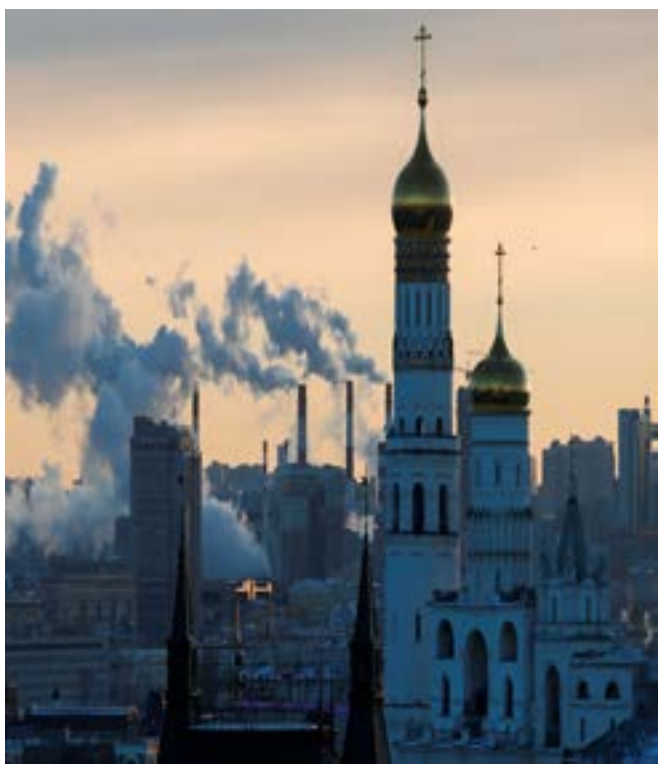
Dakar Rally - 2018 Peru-Bolivia-Argentina Dakar rally - 40th Dakar Edition stage four, San Juan de Marcona to San Juan de Marcona - January 9, 2018. Nasser Al-Attiyah of Qatar and Matthieu Baumel of France try to move their stuck Toyota.

Japan Transocean Air, JAL group, Boeing 737-400 painted in special livery takes off from the Tokyo International Airport in Tokyo

Muslim women hold placards during a protest rally against a bill passed by India's lower house of Parliament that aims at prosecuting Muslim men who divorce their wives through the "triple talaq," or instant divorce, in Ahmedabad

Palm trees are pictured through rain drops on a car window after a rainstorm in Encinitas, California

French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte Macron pose during their visit to the Forbidden City, in Beijing, China



Steam rises from the chimneys of a thermal power plant behind the Ivan the Great Bell Tower in Moscow

A man watches the sunset with his dog on a breakwater, along the shore of the Mediterranean Sea in Ashkelon

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

COMMUNITY

FDA Officials To Target High-Risk Alternative Remedies

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

In 2009, the FDA ordered Zicam to stop marketing three products that contained zinc gluconate after more than 100 users reported losing their sense of smell.

WASHINGTON — U.S. health officials plan to crack down on a growing number of unproven alternative remedies, focusing on products containing dangerous ingredients that have occasionally been linked to serious injury and death.

The Food and Drug Administration on Monday issued a new proposal for regulating homeopathic medicines that have long been on the fringe of mainstream medicine. The agency plans to target products that pose the biggest safety risks, including those marketed for children or for serious diseases.

But under the government's framework, the vast majority of low-risk products would remain on the market.

Long regarded by scientists as a form of modern-day snake oil, homeopathic products are treated as drugs under law, but not supported by modern science. Most remedies contain heavily diluted drugs, vitamins, and minerals. Popular homeopathic brands include Zicam Allergy Relief and Cold-Eeze.

"We respect that some individuals want to use alternative treatments, but the FDA has a responsibility to protect the public from products that may not deliver any benefit and have the potential to cause harm," FDA Commissioner Dr. Scott Gottlieb said in a statement.

Homeopathic products are similar to dietary supplements, in that the FDA does not review their safety or effectiveness before they are sold. But unlike supplements, homeopathic medicines can state that they are intended for specific medical symptoms and conditions, similar to drugs.

A handful of products in recent years have been subject to major safety problems, usually involving potentially toxic ingredients.

Last year, the FDA warned consumers about the risks of teething tablets marketed by Hyland's Homeopathic after they were tied to seizures and deaths in infants and children. FDA testing later confirmed the products contained high levels of belladonna, also called nightshade, a poisonous herb that has long been used at low dosages in homeopathic medicine. The products were recalled in April.

In 2009, the FDA ordered Zicam to stop marketing three products that contained zinc gluconate after more than 100 users reported losing their sense of smell.

The FDA said its proposal also targets products that claim to treat serious diseases like cancer, or are administered via unconventional routes such as ear drops. The agency will take comments on its proposal for 90 days before beginning to finalize the plan.

Consumer advocates said the FDA plan makes sense for products that are mostly harmless, but can be dangerous if manufacturers stray from traditional ingredients, dosing and manufacturing.

"I think the rules do a good job of going after the things that are most problematic," said Dr. Adriane Fugh-Berman, an associate professor at Georgetown University Medical Center.

The FDA hasn't updated its regulations for homeopathic medicine since 1988, when it essentially exempted the industry from basic production standards that are mandatory for traditional drugs, like listing ingredients on product labels.

Since then the once-niche market has grown into a $3 billion industry, according to FDA figures.

Hundreds of homeopathic remedies today are sold alongside over-the-counter drugs like Tylenol and aspirin at pharmacies across the U.S. The National Institutes of Health has said there's little evidence that homeopathic medicine is effective for treating any specific condition. (Courtesy https://www.statnews.com)

Related

Homeopathic Remedies Harmed Hundreds Of Babies, Families Say, As FDA Investigated For Years

Blaine Talbott, now 3, began twitching in his limbs after taking homeopathic teething products. A neurologist later suggested he may have responded poorly to the tablets.

WASHINGTON — Case 7682299: Aug. 1, 2010. A mother gives her toddler three homeopathic pills to relieve her teething pain. Within minutes, the baby stops breathing.

"My daughter had a seizure, lost consciousness, and stopped breathing about 30 minutes after I gave her three Hyland's Teething Tablets," the mother later told the Food and Drug Administration. "She had to receive mouth-to-mouth CPR to resume breathing and was brought to the hospital."

The company, Hyland's, promotes "safe, effective, and natural health solutions" that appeal to parents seeking alternative treatments. But the agency would soon hear much more about Hyland's teething products. Staff at the FDA would come to consider Case 7682299 one of the luckier outcomes.

A review of FDA records obtained by STAT under the Freedom of Information Act paint a far grimmer picture: Babies who were given Hyland's teething products turned blue and died. Babies had repeated seizures. Babies became delirious. Babies were airlifted to the hospital, where emergency room staff tried to figure out what had caused their legs and arms to start twitching.

Over a 10-year period, from 2006 and 2016, the FDA collected reports of "adverse events" in more than 370 children who had used Hyland's homeopathic teething tablets or gel, a similar product that is applied directly to a baby's gums. Agency records show eight cases in which babies were reported to have died after taking Hyland's products, though the FDA says the question of whether those products caused the deaths is still under review.

(The agency is also investigating two other deaths tied to teething remedies but declined to confirm the manufacturer of the products or provide the case reports.)

Following an FDA warning in September, Hyland's said that it would no longer manufacture the teething products. But they remained on some store shelves for months, and are still available on the Internet. They likely continue to be used in homes nationwide.

Hyland's, a 114-year-old private company based in Los Angeles, is the nation's largest homeopathic business. It insists its products are safe and says the FDA has failed to show there is a scientific link between them and infant seizures or other complications.

"That doesn't mean that children don't have a sensitivity to a product. There is a lot of sensitivity on kids' parts and we have to watch carefully," said a spokeswoman, Mary Borneman. "It's not something that condemns the entire product line."

Behind each of the FDA case numbers are angry and, in some cases, heartbroken parents. But a STAT examination — and the first detailed look at the case reports — also raises questions over the response of regulators.

It took four years until the FDA pushed Hyland's to reformulate its remedies, in 2010. In the seven years since then, there has been a steady stream of reports of adverse events tied to Hyland's homeopathic teething products.

"The FDA could bring the hammer down on them," said Sarah Sorscher, an attorney for the nonprofit Public Citizen Health Research Group. "But it doesn't. At the point where you have infants being hospitalized and deaths reported, it's simply not acceptable for the agency to delay in taking action."

An FDA spokeswoman defended the agency's handling of the matter.

"It is important to note that while adverse event reports give us some information about a product and serious injuries or deaths related to use of a particular product, they often indicate situations that require additional analysis and do not constitute conclusive evidence of a problem with the product," the spokeswoman, Lyndsay Meyer, said in a statement.

Despite the FDA's difficulty in proving Hyland's products harmed children, some doctors had no doubt.

In case 462749, dated Sept. 15, 2011, a physician sent Hyland's a handwritten note, stating his patient, a 5-month-old girl, was unresponsive for 45 minutes after taking its teething tablets.

"I am sure this was not an allergic reaction," he wrote. "I would like you to report it, find a contact at the FDA, so we can start an investigation and pull this dangerous, unregulated product form the shelves."

One mother wrote the company to say her son's pupils dilated "like marbles with big black eyes." Another described seizures her daughter continued to have after taking the tablets and told the company, "I hate hate hate u for this."

An industry giant in a giant industry

Hyland's and its parent company, Standard Homeopathy Co., are considered major players in the homeopathic market. CEO John P. Borneman comes from a family that has been in the business for generations, and is president of the industry group that publishes the Homeopathic Pharmacopeia, a compendium that serves as the bible of the industry.

Homeopathy has become a multibillion-dollar industry. Its products are big sellers around the world, and popular with adherents from Cher to Prince Charles. The industry also has political clout: It has been able to exempt itself from many rules proposed by Congress and the FDA over the years.

Unlike pharmaceutical company-produced drugs, homeopathic products don't have to prove that they are effective at treating anything in particular before going on the market. It is left to the FDA's drug division to determine whether they are unsafe after they are on the market — a difficult task since the adverse event reports are generally considered to represent only a fraction of the actual incidents and may lack sufficient information to allow for thorough investigations.

"If I'm working in the emergency room and I have a family that comes in with a seizing infant, I may not have the wherewithal to get the history of homeopathic use," said Dr. Edward W. Boyer, a toxicologist in Harvard Medical School's emergency medicine department.

In some cases, parents assume that products described as natural remedies, as is the case with Hyland's tablets and gels, could not possibly result in complications, and never mention their use to a doctor. Without sufficient evidence of a problem, the FDA lacks what it needs to use the enforcement tools it does have.

'Deadly nightshade'

In investigating Hyland's teething products, the FDA focused on an ingredient known as atropa belladonna, an herb known colloquially as "deadly nightshade."

In diluted form, the substance is not expected to pose any health risk. In 2010, however, FDA inspectors who examined Hyland's facilities criticized the company for substandard manufacturing practices and found inconsistent levels of atropa belladonna in its products.

The agency issued a public warning, noting "reports of serious adverse events in children taking this product that are consistent with belladonna toxicity."

It also noted that "infants are very susceptible to the neurotoxicity of drugs" because of how the body distributes and responds to drugs, and noted that "absorption of belladonna from the skin and mouth was fairly rapid. "

The company voluntarily took the products off shelves and agreed to reformulate them, although it insisted they were safe.

"We felt it was the right thing to do so that parents didn't have to be concerned about the product," said Borneman, the spokeswoman.

But the number of serious adverse events tied by the FDA to the products kept climbing. Some pediatricians and neurologists concluded the tablets and gels were the cause. Many parents wrote to the FDA, accusingly, asking why the pills were still on the market.

In September 2016, the FDA announced that it was investigating more adverse events reports and recommended that consumers stop using Hyland's and other homeopathic teething products and dispose of any in their possession. Some stores, including Target and CVS, which sold Hyland's and other homeopathic teething products, pulled them in response.

"Homeopathic medicine has a very large margin of safety," she said. "Our testing ensures there's not too much belladonna in any bottle" of tablets.

Several weeks ago, on Jan. 27, the FDA issued another warning, saying that laboratory analysis of Hyland's teething tablets found levels of belladonna "sometimes far exceeding the amount claimed on the label." The agency warned consumers not to use the products and to seek medical care immediately if their child has seizures, difficulty breathing, lethargy, muscle weakness, or other problems after using homeopathic teething products.

The FDA also said there was no evidence that they actually worked.

Critics say the fact that homeopathic products are generally highly diluted has kept them on the FDA's back burner.

"It's low on their priority list," said Dr. Aaron S. Kesselheim, who co-authored a paper in the New England Journal of Medicine last year on the subject. "FDA for a long time just kind of deferred on homeopathic products because they are mostly inert and so diluted. The harm comes from people wasting their money, or diverting them from things that do work."

One problem the FDA has in doing so is a matter of staffing: The agency has a medical officer review each report from manufacturers, but it doesn't have someone who can routinely follows up with the patient, the patient's family, or physician for missing records necessary to take a serious enforcement action.

Outraged by the standoff between FDA and Hyland's, Connecticut Democratic Rep. Rosa DeLauro introduced a bill last week called the Recall Unsafe Drugs Act. The proposal would give the FDA mandatory recall authority over homeopathic products and drugs.

"Hyland's refusal to recall its teething tablets, despite numerous health and safety warnings from the FDA, is downright shameful," DeLauro said, adding that the company "is choosing instead to prioritize the company's profits and reputation before the safety of our children."

"As it stands the FDA would have to go through an arduous legal process to take action against manufacturers such as Hyland's. "This is unacceptable and threatens the health and safety of American families. "

FDA U.S. FOOD & DRUG ADMINISTRATION

For the parents of Case 10723317, any action would come too late. A mother reported that on July 9, 2014, her 9-month-old daughter died after being given two teething tablets, crushed, for the first time. She gave her infant the tablets, then a bottle, and then left her to sleep. When she checked on her 45 minutes later, she was dead in her crib, beside a puddle of vomit.

Five months later, after reading online reports suggesting babies may experience seizures after taking belladonna, she contacted Hyland's.

"Customer did not request a refund or replacement," noted the Hyland's staffer who filed the report with the FDA. Hyland's also noted that it was not able to test the bottle, because the customer threw it away.

"Due to the limited information provided by the reporter no further investigation is possible at this time of this incident," the company concluded. (Courtesy http://www.foxnews.com/health)

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

Local News

New cellphone emergency alerts could target areas as small as Minute Maid Park

By Robert Downen

Emergency alerts warning of flooding, tornadoes or other looming disasters could be targeted to specific neighborhoods under proposed upgrades to the nation's emergency alerts system, filling a gap exposed during Hurricane Harvey. The proposed changes, announced Tuesday by Federal Communications Commission Chairman Ajit Pai, would allow officials to use "device-based geo-targeting" to send alerts to all the cellphones in areas as small as one-tenth of a mile in radius. The current Wireless Emergency Alerts system only allows officials to target all cellphones in a county.

"If adopted, it will be the single most important improvement to the nation's alerts and warnings infrastructure in years," said Francisco Sanchez, Harris County's deputy emergency management coordinator.

He said that the current system's lack of precision was particularly problematic during Hurricane Harvey, which battered all 1,700 square miles of Harris County for days on end, overwhelming 911 systems and forcing officials to use mobile applications like Nextdoor to communicate with residents in dangerous areas.

As controlled releases began upstream of Buffalo Bayou, for example, Sanchez said OEM had two choices: send evacuation alerts to every cellphone in the county, possibly pushing tens of thousands of people out of their safe homes and into deadly floodwaters, or hope that thousands of people along the bayou would check social media during the night.

"I would have loved to have been able to draw a polygon around Buffalo Bayou and say, 'Hey, water is being released, expect water to rise,'" Sanchez said. "But because I didn't have that granularity, that message would have gone countywide."

The 49-page proposal unveiled by Pai largely mirrors suggestions from some of the nation's largest public safety organizations. If approved at the FCC's Jan. 30 meeting in Washington, the recommendations also would also require the upgrades happen before November 2019 — years earlier than had been requested by companies including AT&T and Verizon Wireless.

Such changes have long been opposed by the nation's top telecommunications companies, which argue that the upgrades would be expensive and could potentially overload their networks.

The FCC in 2016 quadrupled the maximum length of a wireless alert to 360 characters and pushed for more alerts in Spanish. But wireless carriers do not currently have to assist with narrowing alert targeting to specific neighborhoods, and have lobbied heavily against any such requirements.

But emergency management officials say those concerns should be secondary to the safety of Americans. In a Friday letter to the FCC, leaders from five of the nation's largest public safety groups said the technology for implementing more precise alerts is already in place.

"Phones are capable of precise geo-targeting today and WEA must have access to these capabilities," the group wrote. "Without the ability to geo-target our alert originators will continue to use WEA sparingly or not at all."

"This is a shame," the letter continued. "An effective WEA can literally mean the difference between life and death."

That sentiment has been shared by a bipartisan group of representatives from disaster-prone areas around the country. After officials from Sonoma County, California cited lack of precision as one of their reasons not to deploy WEAs during historic wildfires last year, California Democratic Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Kamala Harris wrote a joint letter to the FCC stressing the need for upgrades.

Texas Rep. Pete Olson, R-Sugar Land, voiced similar concerns in the wake of Harvey.

"Almost 11 years (after Hurricane Katrina), we continue to witness event after tragic event where an effective and reliable emergency alert system could have saved lives," he wrote in a Sept. 27 opinion column for the Houston Chronicle. "As we are in hurricane season and face more natural and man-made disasters in our future, our citizens deserve and need a device-based public alert system now that will deliver timely and accurate information to those who find themselves in harm's way."

Hamilton Bean, a University of Colorado-Denver professor who's studied WEAs extensively, said Tuesday that the recommendations were "a step in the right direction."

Bean, however, said that until more precise technology is officially adopted, emergency managers will have to be careful with when or how they deploy alerts.

"It is a dilemma: Risk sending WEAs to the wrong people, prompting them to opt out of the notifications altogether, or delay sending potentially life-saving alerts for a year or two until precision improves," he said. "I do not envy any emergency manager who has to make that kind of cost-benefit calculation."