

Govt Shelves Barcoding Plan for Primary Packaging of Medicines

Commerce ministry postponed proposal in the past after pharma cos opposed move

RAJI REDDY KESIREDDY
HYDERABAD

India, which had proposed barcoding of medicines to track and trace export consignments after allegations that spurious drugs were making their way into the market, will exempt primary packaging consisting single tablets, capsules and vials from the barcoding stipulation, said senior bureaucrats.

The commerce ministry, which had made it mandatory for pharmaceuticals exporters to have barcoding for secondary and tertiary packaging over the last couple of years, had many times postponed barcoding for primary packaging following opposition from producers who said the plan is not feasible.

While the barcoding for tertiary packaging (box of strips) came into effect from October 2012, the Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) made it mandatory for secondary packaging (strip of tablets, capsules or vials) from January last year. DGFT wanted the industry to adhere to barcoding on primary packaging from July 1.

The industry, while pointing out that such a stipulation was non-existent glob-

ally, has once again opposed the fresh deadline saying the space for printing the stipulated size of barcode was not sufficient in human readable form on primary packaging. Adopting sophisticated technologies to print unique product identification code on primary packaging involved huge and unwarranted capital expenditure, they pointed out.

India exported \$14.8 billion (₹90,000 crore) worth of pharmaceuticals during fiscal to March 2014, reporting a marginal growth of 2% from a year ago, the slowest growth rate in the last 15 years.

Commerce secretary Rajeev Kher told ET recently that the ministry has decided not to insist on industry adhering to the latest deadline on barcoding for primary packaging following resistance from exporters.

A senior commerce ministry bureaucrat, who did not want to be identified, said, "The ministry has decided to exempt the industry from adhering to barcoding on primary packaging. However, the stipulation on secondary and tertiary packaging will continue to help the government track and trace export consignments. DGFT would make a formal announcement soon."

Director general of pharmaceuticals exports promotion council (Pharmexcll) PV Appaji said, "We were given to understand that the commerce ministry has decided to do away with barcoding on primary packaging but we are yet to receive a formal communication. We told the exporters that the DGFT is not going to insist on the latest deadline of July 1 and to expect a formal communication soon."

Regulatory