

1,500 Number of toddlers and babies who wound up in emergency rooms over a two-year period and three died because of bad reactions to cold or cough medicine, federal health officials reported yesterday. **AP**

For the record **George Mimar** diamond merchant

Ethics on ice

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INTERVIEW. When it comes to diamonds, ethical concerns can make consumers cool toward ice. Surprisingly, it is Canada that is looking to warm buyers into a trip to the jewelry store.

While diamonds have helped bolster economies of countries like Namibia and Botswana — where in some cases partnerships with diamond companies have helped fund improvements to education, infrastructure and social programs — it has led to exploitation and suffering elsewhere.

So when vast deposits of diamonds were found in Canada's Northwest Territories in the early 1990s, the Canadian government enacted the Canadian Diamond Code of Conduct to track diamonds and ensure that stones being called Canadian diamonds could be authenticated as such. Each diamond is laser-etched with an identification number that consumers can use to trace their diamond.

Though adherence to the code is voluntary, the registry includes the makers of the two most well-known Canadian brands — Polar Bear and Eskimo Arctic Ice.

George Mimar, co-owner of MDL Diamond

Merchants, which produces Eskimo Arctic Ice diamonds, cites both the tracking of the diamonds and the ethics of Canadian diamond companies to tout his product.

Metro spoke to Mimar about the value of paperwork, the cost of ethics and the merits of a Canadian road trip for all your diamond shopping.

Your company's partner, BHP Billiton, owns an 80 percent stake in the EKATI mine in the Northwest Territories. What is the environmental impact of the mine and how much does it produce?

When the mine first opened, the government was very strict about what you could and couldn't take out of there and how you could get diamonds out. It's environmentally sound. It's

What about the Eskimos?

In the mid-'90s, mining agreements for the EKATI were signed with several tribes in the Northwest Territories, including the Inuit of Kugluktuk, the Kitikmeot Inuit Association and the North Slave Metis Alliance. The details of these agreements were confidential, so what percentage, if any, of the diamond proceeds that belong to the tribes remain a mystery. However, BHP Billiton's Web site says the mining company attempts to reserve 62 percent of its jobs for residents of the Northwest Territories and 31 percent for tribe members.

The 17 pages of the Canadian Code of Conduct are pretty strict about tracking Canadian diamonds. How does that compare to similar documents like the Kimberley Process, which isn't state-sponsored but tracks diamonds coming out of Africa?

It exceeds it by 100 percent. Our diamonds fall under the Canadian Code of Conduct, unlike those from U.S. companies who are not beholden to it. U.S. merchants can say they're selling Canadian diamonds and aren't bound under law to offer any proof. If we make that claim, we have to provide the documentation. It's a voluntary code, but it's enforced.

estimated that by 2010, it will account for about 15 percent of the world's diamond production.

If you're a U.S. consumer considering Canadian diamonds, what should you keep in mind?

If you're buying in the U.S., the first question you should ask is, "Does the U.S. company belong to the Canadian Diamond Code of Conduct?" Some U.S. companies do. It only costs them \$500 a year, but the only time the diamonds really get tracked are if the consumer asks for it. They can contact the Canadian government with their



GETTY IMAGES

"If you buy from a dealer here who belongs to the code, the diamond is more guaranteed to be from Canada. U.S. firms aren't punishable by law, but Canadian companies can be fined or thrown off of the Canadian Code of Conduct," says Mimar.

number and, for \$50, they can track it. My advice, though, is to buy the diamond in Canada.

So sell us your diamond. What do you get from a Canadian diamond that you can't get elsewhere?
In the case of our diamonds, Eskimo specifically, BHP Billiton poured a lot of money into its

mining operations to make sure employees were safe and treated properly. The diamonds cost a lot more to make than in Africa, certainly, but when you're paying for a Canadian stone, you're paying for the quality and ethics. You're paying for minimum wages, benefits, the kind of surroundings people have,

their safety equipment — what kind of masks are they using? You have workers in Africa working long shifts with no benefits making as little as \$2 an hour. Our workers at the EKATI mine are two hours north of Yellowknife just below the Arctic Circle, so they're fairly remote, but they're compensated well.

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