

Document 2008

[22008001]

Reuben Mark, chairman of Colgate-Palmolive Co., said he is "comfortable" with analysts' estimates that third-quarter earnings rose to between 95 cents and \$ 1.05 a share.

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That compares with per-share earnings from continuing operations of 69 cents the year earlier; including discontinued operations, per-share was 88 cents a year ago.

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Analysts estimate Colgate's world-wide third-quarter sales rose about 8 % to \$ 1.29 billion.

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Mr. Mark attributed the earnings growth to strong sales in Latin America, Asia and Europe.

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Results were also bolstered by "a very meaningful increase in operating profit by Colgate's U.S. business," Mr. Mark said.

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Operating profit at Colgate's U.S. household products and personal-care businesses jumped 25 % in the quarter, Mr. Mark added.

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He said the improvement was a result of cost savings achieved by consolidating manufacturing operations, blending two sales organizations and focusing more carefully the company's promotional activities.

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The estimated improvement in Colgate's U.S. operations took some analysts by surprise.

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Colgate's household products business, which includes such brands as Fab laundry detergent and Ajax cleanser, has been a weak performer.

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Analysts estimate Colgate's sales of household products in the U.S. were flat for the quarter, and they estimated operating margins at only 1 % to 3 %.

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"But it's not mediocre, it's a real problem."

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"Improving profitability of U.S. operations is an extremely high priority in the company."

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