

PET FOOD RECALL

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BACKGROUND

In 2007, Menu Foods, the manufacturer of over 180 wet and dry pet food brands, was forced to recall over 60-million containers of pet food in the United States. The culprit was Chinese suppliers who had laced the wheat gluten and rice protein in the food with the contaminants melamine and cyanuric acid in order to elevate protein levels. These contaminants formed crystals in the kidneys of dogs and cats and caused kidney disease and failure. In the U.S., over 13,000 pets died and another 9000 became sick. Over 100 civil cases were filed, eventually being combined into one class action lawsuit. The class action suit was settled in 2010 for \$24 million. The owners of ChemNutra, the American company that imported and sold the food to Menu Foods pled guilty to *unknowingly* selling and distributing adulterated food and were fined \$35,000 and given three years of probation. Menu Foods was bought by Simmons Pet Food in 2010 and ChemNutra is no longer in business.

REPERCUSSIONS

Due to delays in alerting the public and delays in removing the contaminated pet food from store shelves, a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) audit was requested by Iowa Senator Tom Harkin, chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry. The Office of Inspector General's (OIG) report of the FDA's conduct during the pet food recall found that the FDA lacked statutory authority to impose recalls and lacked the ability to penalize companies for recall violations. The report also found that the agency was lax in following its own protocols during the recall. The ensuing public outcry resulted in the FDA being forced to more closely monitor and inspect pet food ingredients, especially from China. The agency was required to coordinate more information with the states during similar recalls. As a result, the FDA established PETNet (Pet Event Tracking Network) for federal and state agencies to report pet food problems. (See www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/newpetfoodrecalls/#Dog for dog food recalls.)



MELAMINE IN OTHER FOODS

The FDA was further criticized for not restricting the level of melamine in food products, even after news reports that 50,000 Chinese children were sickened and four died from melamine tainted baby's formula. Melamine was also found in wheat flour and animal feed imported from China. High levels in animal feed were alarming because of the possibility of contamination in dairy products. The FDA did not test for melamine before 2007, but developed a high-performance test to determine the amount of melamine contamination in foods after the pet food scare. The World Health Organization (WHO) divided levels of melamine contamination into "baseline" and "adulteration" levels. Baseline levels were naturally occurring (<1mg/kg) and were not considered to be of concern. Adulteration levels above baseline levels occurred when melamine was intentionally and illegally added to food or animal feed. A list of adulterated products can be found at www.fda.gov "Melamine Contamination in China."

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

<http://news.vin.com>

- Report Scrutinizes FDA's work in 2007 pet food recall, 09/10/2009;
- \$24-million pet food settlement approved, 10/16/2008;
- Arrest made in melamine contamination case;
[www.humanesociety.org/animals/resources/facts/pet food safety](http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/resources/facts/pet_food_safety)
- Commonsense tips, the latest recalls and new FDA rules to protect your pets.
[http://www.who.int/foodsafety/fs management/Melamine](http://www.who.int/foodsafety/fs_management/Melamine)
- WHO (World Health Organization) Toxicological and Health Aspects of Melamine and Cyanuric Acid. 21 October 2009.

Credit to Kaye Klapper

