

TESTIMONY

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BEFORE

THE SENATE AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT,

AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEE

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Introduction

Mr. Chairman, I am Stephen F. Sundlof, Director of the FDA Center for Veterinary Medicine. Joining me today is Dr. Steven Solomon, Deputy Director for the Office of Regional Operations, for FDA's Office of Regulatory Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to appear at today's hearing to discuss the recent contamination of pet food. As a pet owner, and as a veterinarian, I recognize how important pets are to many Americans. I offer my sympathy to pet owners whose pets have become ill or died due to contaminated pet food.

The recall hit very close to home for me, as I have two dogs of my own. At the time that FDA first learned of the contamination, I was feeding my dogs one of the öcuts and gravyö dog foods on the recall list.

FDA is conducting a thorough investigation of the pet food contamination. During the past four weeks we have aggressively worked to identify the source and scope of the contamination, to assure the removal of all contaminated products from the supply chain and store shelves, and to keep the public informed. At this point, we believe we have identified the source, the importer, its supplier, and all of the parties directly receiving the suspect material ó wheat gluten contaminated with melamine.

In addition to responding to the pet-related dynamic of this situation, we actively investigated any potential risk to the human food supply. At this time, we have no evidence to suggest that any of the imported wheat gluten contaminated with melamine entered the human food supply. As an added precaution, however, we have asked the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

to use its surveillance network to monitor for signs of human illness, such as increased renal failure, that could indicate contamination of the human food supply.

Background on FDA Regulation of Pet Food

The pet food industry is responsible for adherence to good manufacturing practices. FDA conducts risk-based inspections targeted toward products that pose the greatest risks to public health. However, inspections cannot identify every potential contaminant and are only one aspect of our work to detect and contain problem such as this. In addition, it is important for all participants in the production and distribution process to maintain the highest standards for safety to protect the American consumer, whether that consumer is human or animal. As with human food safety, FDA recognizes that we need to use strong science capable of identifying both the sources of risk and effective control measure. To that end, FDA is working to develop a risk-based Animal Feed Safety System that describes how animal feed should made, distributed, and used. The Animal Feed Safety System is designed to minimize risks to humans and animals from unsafe animal feed.

Scope of the Pet Food Recall

To date, manufacturers have voluntarily recalled more than 100 brands of dog and cat food across the nation. Manufacturers participating in the recall of pet food products include: Menu Foods, Hillø Pet Nutrition, P&G Pet Care, Nestle Purina PetCare Company, Del Monte Pet Products, and Sunshine Mills. The importer, ChemNutra, has also recalled the raw ingredient, wheat gluten. Although this is one of the largest pet food recalls in history, according to the Pet Food Institute, a trade association representing pet food manufacturers, the product recalled currently represents less than one percent of all dog and cat food on the market. This indicates

that consumers have access to an ample supply of pet food to meet the needs of their pets. Nonetheless, we recognize the serious risks that the contaminated pet food represents to pets that consume this food, which is why we are devoting the resources needed to assure the success of the investigation and the pet food recall.

To ensure the success of the pet food recall, FDA is working with the recalling firms and with our many public health partners. We are cooperating with the 50 state departments of agriculture, health authorities, veterinarians, the Association of American Feed Control Officials. FDA is also conducting recall effectiveness audits to ensure manufacturers and other recalling firms remove the recalled product from the pet food supply chain.

Investigation of Pet Food Contamination

FDA's investigation has been aggressive and comprehensive. As soon as FDA received word of a problem with pet foods, our first priority was to limit the risk of animal injury and death related to contamination. We worked to quickly identify the scope of the problem, to ensure that the manufacturer removed potentially-contaminated products from the market, and to inform consumers not to feed their animals the recalled products.

FDA began a large-scale investigation. Within 24 hours of learning from Menu Foods of the problem, our investigators were on-site at the Menu Foods Emporia, Kansas plant searching for the source of contamination. FDA sent samples of wheat gluten to our Forensic Chemistry Center (FCC) in Cincinnati, and within 24 hours the FCC scientists confirmed the presence of melamine in samples taken from the pet food and wheat gluten. In addition, FDA's Office of Crisis Management activated FDA's Emergency Operations Center, which has worked

seamlessly with FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine, district offices, headquarters, labs, public affairs and office of international programs.

More than 400 FDA employees in all 20 district offices have taken calls from consumers and veterinarians who reported illnesses potentially associated with the contaminated pet food. FDA received more than 12,000 reports during the past four weeks, which is more than twice the number of complaints that our consumer complaint coordinators typically receive in a year. Additionally, ten FDA district offices have inspected manufacturing and distribution facilities and five field laboratories have analyzed samples.

To ensure consumers awareness of the contamination, FDA participated in six on-camera broadcast interviews, answered hundreds of inquiries from media outlets across the world and conducted five media briefings with 75 to 100 reporters. To keep consumers up to date on the recalled pet foods, FDA continues to give background phone interviews and updates to broadcast media.

A review of records allowed FDA to identify the importer and initial distributor of the contaminated wheat gluten. Through our investigation, FDA determined the Chinese supplier, Xuzhou Anying Biologic Technology Development Company. FDA has asked the Chinese government to participate in the investigation. To prevent manufacturers from using contaminated wheat gluten in pet food and to assess how widespread the melamine contamination of wheat gluten is, FDA issued an import alert regarding the supplier from China. Under FDA's import alert, we are detaining all wheat gluten imported from Xuzhou Anying Biologic Technology Development Company to assure that contaminated product does not enter

U.S. commerce. We also initiated an import sampling assignment. This assignment requires 100 percent sampling of import shipments of wheat gluten from China and from the Netherlands, which is known to source some of its wheat gluten from China.

To understand how the contamination affected dogs and cats, FDA scientists, in conjunction with academia and industry, are reviewing blood and tissue samples of affected animals to understand how wheat gluten contaminated with melamine contributed to the pet illnesses. We are also working with data from Banfield Pet Hospital, (a nationwide network of veterinary hospitals), the Veterinary Information Network, Poison Control Centers, universities, and other organizations to assess the number of cats and dogs affected by the contaminated wheat gluten. This is a collaborative partnership providing FDA access to information and helping FDA deliver essential health communications about the safety of pets.

Closing

This investigation has been a massive effort drawing from many parts of the FDA and will continue until we are completely satisfied that the cause has been determined, the scope identified, and full and complete corrective action is initiated and effective. Thousands of dedicated professionals across the country are working to respond to this contamination. We will continue to monitor the ongoing recalls to ensure that they are effective and to support the safety of all food and animal feed in the United States. We will also promptly inform the public of any additional findings from the investigation on the recent outbreak of cat and dog illness.

We appreciate the extraordinary cooperation of our federal and state partners, health authorities, veterinarians, the news media, the American public, and others who have supported this investigation. We also appreciate the prompt action and cooperation of the firms who voluntarily initiated recalls and the continued support of other distributors and retailers affected by the recall. The cooperation and coordination of all of the professionals in this contamination incident enhanced FDA's ability to respond in the moment, to focus on the public health issue at hand, and help ensure the safety of America's pet food.