

4/17/07

The Facts about Contamination and the Recent Pet Food Recall

Related to the recent recall of certain pet food products, there may be some confusion about wheat gluten as an ingredient in pet foods. The concerns about wheat gluten are understandable, yet are likely based on incomplete information. Wheat gluten is a safe food ingredient and **not** the reason for the recall. **The recall, according to findings of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), is the result of contamination**—specifically, the introduction of **melamine** into a food ingredient.

What is Melamine?

Melamine is a chemical substance used to produce durable, heat-resistant plastic for building materials, fire-retardant fabrics and kitchenware. *Melamine is not approved for use in pet food or human food and should not be present in wheat gluten or any other food ingredient.* The FDA has not yet determined exactly how melamine got into the contaminated wheat gluten.

What is Wheat Gluten?

Wheat gluten is the natural protein extracted from wheat or wheat flour. In addition to its rich protein content, wheat gluten produces the texture and consistency desired in many high quality food products, both human and pet. It has been a trusted food ingredient, used for decades in the preparation of breakfast cereals, high quality pastas and whole wheat bakery goods. Baking represents more than 60% of the total usage worldwide, and many of our healthier multi-grain and whole grain breads would not be appealing without it.

Why is Wheat Gluten an Important Pet Food Ingredient?

Just as wheat gluten is used in human foods, such as breads, to provide a desired consistency and texture, wheat gluten is used in pet foods for similar reasons. Many pet foods use wheat gluten to help other ingredients come together to form nutritious, good tasting, and appealing foods. While primarily used to enhance texture, wheat gluten also provides good quality protein. With 75% concentration of protein by weight, wheat gluten is an excellent source of protein. When used in combination with other protein sources, a balanced level of amino acids can be attained for the dietary needs of the cat and dog. In its complementary effect with other protein sources, wheat gluten also promotes lean muscle mass and healthy organs.

Purina has used wheat gluten in its foods for nearly twenty years without incident. Independent regulatory organizations, including the U.S. FDA and the Association of American Feed Control Officials, as well as respected professional organizations like the American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Institute of Baking, all acknowledge the nutritional value and suitability of wheat gluten in foods for human or pet consumption. There should be no concern with wheat gluten as a pet food ingredient.

Where Does the Wheat Gluten Supply Come From?

It should be noted that the wheat gluten used in most pet foods is the same quality wheat gluten used in human foods. It is sourced from the same countries, the same suppliers and inspected to meet the same high human food quality control standards. The U. S. is the largest user of wheat gluten in total, and our country's use of the ingredient in human and pet foods exceeds what is produced domestically by the agricultural industry. As a result, 80% of the U.S. demand for wheat gluten is fulfilled from Europe and Asia due to limited supplies in the U.S., where the remaining 20% is sourced.

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An Incident of Contaminated Wheat Gluten

On March 30 the FDA announced discovery of wheat gluten contaminated with melamine from a single supply source. The contaminated wheat gluten represents less than half of 1% of all the wheat gluten used in human and pet foods in the U.S. during the past year. The majority of the contaminated ingredient was supplied to Menu Foods, though it was distributed to other pet food manufacturers, as well. The FDA continues its investigation to ensure that all of the contaminated wheat gluten has been identified and contained. While the FDA further investigates how melamine was introduced into a historically safe and good food ingredient, it is suspected that the melamine contamination may have been caused by tampering.

Nestlé Purina's Immediate Response

Within hours of the March 30 FDA announcement of the melamine contamination, Nestlé Purina determined that a limited quantity of the FDA-identified contaminated wheat gluten had been used in specific, limited production runs at one of Purina's 17 pet food manufacturing facilities. The company then notified the FDA and immediately began the recall process of limited quantities of Alpo Prime Cuts in Gravy canned dog food with specific date codes. Nestlé Purina has strict quality assurance procedures that provide for traceability of ingredients and isolation of finished products, which enabled it to determine that the contaminated wheat gluten was not used in any other Purina products manufactured at its other facilities. The affected Alpo Prime Cuts in Gravy and Mighty Dog pouch products, produced by Menu Foods, have been recalled from retail stores.

Rigorous Food Safety and Testing Procedures Strengthened

Nestlé Purina's rigorous food safety and testing procedures are based on significant and likely risks for each particular ingredient, and every incoming load of ingredients, including wheat gluten, is inspected. Until this incident, it has never been a pet food or human food industry standard to test ingredients for melamine. Since this incident, however, Nestlé Purina PetCare has implemented a new process to test for melamine in its wheat gluten supplies. Every lot of wheat gluten is now sampled for the presence of melamine. Nestlé Purina is also implementing additional technology to further screen its pet food ingredients.

Taking Action

Nothing is more important to Nestlé Purina than the health and well-being of the pets whose nutrition has been entrusted to Purina products by their owners. The loss of a pet or a pet's health due to pet food contamination is distressing and frustrating to those involved.

Melamine should not be contained in food. The FDA and Nestlé Purina are taking additional steps to make sure it does not appear in pet food again. These steps include: 1) FDA prohibiting the original supplier of contaminated wheat gluten from any further importation into the U.S.; 2) FDA inspection of 100% of all Chinese wheat gluten offered for import, regardless of the supplier; and 3) Nestlé Purina testing 100% of its wheat gluten shipments for the presence of melamine.

[Nestlé Purina associates](#), most of whom are pet owners and feed Purina products, continue to work diligently with total commitment to address and resolve this situation, respond to concerns of consumers, customers and veterinarians and take whatever actions are necessary to protect the health and well-being of the millions of dogs and cats who eat Purina foods.