



Melamine Concerns Widen

In early March 2007, many Americans were devastated when their pets became ill or died from pet food that was contaminated with melamine from China. Nearly 100 brands of pet food were recalled. A month later, a U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) news release indicated that "the ongoing investigation [was] tracing products distributed since August 2006."

But the practice of adding melamine to food products in China goes back more than a decade. In April 2007, CBS News and the Associated Press interviewed Wang Jianhui, the manager of a feed company in the city of Shijiazhuang. Wang pointed out that Chinese producers had been using melamine for years. "We've been running the melamine feed business for about 15 years and receiving positive responses from our customers," Wang said. "Our products are very safe, for sure," he emphasized, according to the report.

Later in the same report, another Chinese businessman indicated that there had been no attempts to stop Chinese companies from adding the poisonous chemical to food. "As far as I know," Ji Denghui, manager of the Sanming Dinghui Chemical Trading Company, told reporters, "there are no rules or regulations that make this illegal." Although China placed a ban in 2007 on melamine in food products exported to the United States, China denies blame for any pet deaths or illnesses.

Awareness of the scope of melamine contamination in food products traced to China grew in 2008 when news that tens of thousands of infants in China had been sickened by contaminated milk powder. Four children died while thousands of others were treated for melamine related kidney disorders. As a result, in the United States on October 10, 2008, the FDA issued an [alert](#) stating: "The U.S. and other countries have been sampling and testing infant formula, milk-derived ingredients, and finished food products containing milk. Information received from a number of sources, and from a number of different countries, indicates a wide range and variety of [products](#), such as candies, desserts, and beverages, have been found to be contaminated with melamine. To date, FDA testing has found melamine contamination in multiple products imported from China."

While the United States has continued to import food products from China, the communist government in Beijing has in the past been quick to slap sanctions on U.S. producers. On December 25, 2003, China placed a ban on imports of U.S. beef and beef-related products after a U.S. cow was reported with mad cow disease. According to Li Changjiang, head of the State Administration of Quality Supervision,



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Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ), "Such imported goods, as well as their producers, will be put on the blacklist or even publicized in the mass media if necessary." This, despite the fact that the incident was exceedingly rare, the United States quickly recalled 10,000 pounds of beef, and the risk to consumers was practically zero since no brain or spinal cord tissues — where mad cow is carried — were involved.

Despite this, it wasn't until June 29, 2006 that China lifted the ban and resumed beef imports from the United States. Yet, despite the deaths and illnesses from the contamination of animal feed, toothpaste, the drug heparin, and human food, "the FDA declared on October 3 that food products with levels of the industrial chemical below 2.5 ppm pose little risk."

This means that Americans may still be exposed to a melamine-laced food supply, a fact not lost on at least one member of Congress. "By not insisting on a zero-tolerance policy with melamine," Rep. Rosa DeLaura (D-Conn.) stated, "FDA is failing to protect consumers."



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