

CONTINUATION OF BRIEF

When tested in laboratory animals (rats and mice), melamine has shown very low toxicity and has only been found harmful when present in extremely high doses. Studies have shown formation of bladder tumors in rats when they were fed a diet that was 1 percent melamine, which would be an extremely high dose level in foods. There has also been an interest in determining if melamine may present a risk to humans that have consumed meat from animals fed with food containing melamine.

On May 7, 2007, a five-agency report (FDA, CDC, DHS, EPA, USDA) was published indicating that “melamine presents a very low risk to human health from consuming meat from hogs and chickens known to have been fed animal feed supplemented with pet feed that contained melamine and melamine-related compounds.” Even when scientists used the most extreme risk assessment scenario, assuming that a person consumes only foods that were contaminated with melamine at the levels observed in animals fed contaminated feed, the potential exposure was about 2,500 times lower than the dose considered safe. In other words, it was well below any level of public health concern.

This risk assessment team will continue investigating melamine and they are now working on compiling a scientific assessment of the risk to animal health associated with ingestion of animal feed containing melamine and its compounds. In addition, FDA and USDA are in the process of identifying a group of experts to convene a scientific advisory board that would be charged with reviewing the risk assessment of melamine. This group would also be asked to contribute to future scientific analysis related to the risk of melamine and its compounds to humans and animals.

In April 2007, FDA began investigating pet deaths in the U.S. associated with the consumption of pet food contaminated with melamine. Shipments of both wheat gluten and rice protein imported from China have been implicated as part of this 2007 investigation. In addition, corn gluten contaminated with melamine used in pet foods has been implicated during the same period with dog illnesses and deaths in South Africa. In light of the pet food recalls involving the presence of melamine in wheat gluten, rice protein concentrate, and corn gluten, FDA is taking a proactive measure called the “Protein Surveillance Assignment” to help ensure the safety of the U.S. food and feed supply. Within this assignment, there are three goals which are to 1) examine ingredients and finished products imported from China for the presence of melamine and other contaminants, 2) launch an educational campaign to make the food and feed industry more aware, and 3) deter intentional contamination of food and feed through heightened and targeted preventive activities.

I am sure there will be more information presented in the next couple of months. In the meantime, the following websites may be useful as providing good sources of updated information on melamine:

- FDA website: <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~news/whatsnew.html>

- USDA website:
<http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=2007/05/0129.xml>
- Risk assessment group:
<http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/NEWS/2007/NEW01629.html>
- Updated information related to pet food recalls can be found at:
 - <http://www.menufoods.com/recall/>
 - <http://www.purina.com/>
 - <http://www.hillspet.com/>
 - <http://www.delmonte.com/petfoodrecall.html>