

Champion Petfoods Pulls Out of Australian Market

Company's decision based on findings that link irradiated products to health issues in cats.

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Champion Petfoods Ltd., a Canadian pet-food producer, has pulled out of the Australian market after concluding that health issues reportedly found in cats that ate its Orijen brand cat food was caused by Australia's irradiation process. Champion had previously issued a voluntary recall of the pet-food brand from the country.

"Certainly we don't want to be pointing finger," said Peter Muhlenfeld, Champion sales and marketing manager. "We just want to be looking for solutions and ensuring that our product is safe. And in this case, that means not shipping anywhere where our products will be exposed to high levels of irradiation."

According to Champion, a total of six pallets of Orijen cat food were sold through Australian pet specialty retailers between February and October. Champion, which is based in Morinville, Alberta, issued a voluntary recall of Orijen from Australia's shelves on Nov. 20 in a response to multiple reports of cats that ate the food starting to show symptoms of neurological disorders. Muhlenfeld said approximately 30-40 cats were affected and four or five cats were euthanized.

Champion said it conducted several tests, including a toxicology test and complete chemical screening, to determine the cause of the symptoms. No toxins were found, Muhlenfeld said.

Since Australia is the only country to use irradiation out of the 50 where Origin is sold, the company started to look at the possibly of irradiation as the source.

According to the company, the Australian government irradiated Orijen cat food at levels exceeding 60 kilograys. Muhlenfeld said Champion found a study published by the American College of Veterinary Pathologists that determined a gamma-irradiated diet of 35-45 kilograys was associated with the same conditions as those reportedly exhibited by the cats in Australia. Human foods, he said, are typically irradiated between 5 and 10 kilograys.

As a result of these findings, Champion announced last Friday it is pulling out of Australia completely and has changed its policy to one that prohibits it from selling to countries where its products will be irradiated. Also, the company plans to partner with a local university to further build upon the research of the correlation between irradiation and health issues in cats.