

## Cause of Food-Related Cat Deaths Still Unknown

**A class-action lawsuit could be imminent against Menu Foods.**

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The pet food that's been linked to the deaths of at least 16 cats and dogs in the United States and caused a massive North American product recall has shown no signs of contamination, its manufacturer says.

The company, Ontario, Canada-based Menu Foods, also says it is still unable to explain why the affected cats and dogs developed acute kidney failure and died.

In a brief telephone interview with the media, March 21, to update the recall and investigation status, Menu Foods Chief Executive and President Paul Henderson said the company hypothesizes that one ingredient, believed to be wheat gluten, represents the highest probability as to the cause.

"But we have been unable to prove that through scientific information," Henderson said.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has sent investigators to Menu Foods' Kansas manufacturing plant, where the contagion is believed to have originated. Because wheat gluten is not usually a problematic source, the FDA says, it's looking at the possibility that a mold or chemical toxin contaminated the wheat gluten.

So far, the affected cat foods have only come from the Kansas plant.

On March 16, because of the reported dog and cat deaths, Ontario, Canada-based Menu Foods Inc., launched a recall of 95 brands of wet dog and cat food produced between Dec. 3, 2006 and March 6, 2007. An estimated 60 million packages were recalled.

Nine of the initial reported animal deaths were cats that fell ill during a quarterly taste test Menu Foods conducted to test the products' palatability, the FDA said.

Meanwhile, a woman in Chicago whose cat died after eating presumably tainted food that was later recalled by Menu Foods, has filed a lawsuit against the company.

Dawn Majerczyk, 43, said her orange tabby, Phoenix, fell sick last week, two days after he ate a single package of Special Kitty, one of 95 pet foods Menu Foods recalled. Majerczyk filed suit in Chicago March 20.

"I want my vet bills [paid for] and I want some compensation for what they did to my kids and for the company's neglect," she said.

As of March 21, Menu Foods said it has yet to see the suit and would have no comment on it.

The FDA said the affliction seems to affect cats more than dogs, and that animals usually show signs of contamination within a few days of consuming tainted food. The FDA also said it expects additional pet deaths as the investigation unfolds, but would not speculate on the number.

Among the symptoms of kidney failure in animals are loss of appetite, nausea and frequent urination.

The recall includes about 90 brands across the entire manufacturing spectrum. A complete list of affected cat foods is available [here](#). Anyone with products identified on these lists should immediately stop feeding them to pets.

Owners of pets affected by the recalled pet foods who wish to report the incident should contact the Food and Drug Administration through its website, to find the FDA complaint coordinator in their state.

[Click here](#) for more information on the Menu Foods recall.

To see all of CatChannel's pet food recall updates, [click here](#).