

Melamine in Recalled Pet Food Might Have Been Intentional

Toxic ingredient might have been used to increase protein content, FDA said.

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Melamine found in wheat gluten and rice protein concentrate imported from China might have been used to “artificially increase protein content,” said Stephen Sundlof, DVM, director of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) Center for Veterinary Medicine.

It’s just a theory at this point, but the FDA is investigating all options, it said.

At this point, however, China has not allowed FDA inspectors into the plants suspected of supplying the contaminated products.

When the pet food recall was initiated in March, the FDA’s investigation focused on wheat gluten imported from China that was tainted with melamine, but earlier this week, the government agency found melamine in a rice protein concentrate imported from China by San Francisco-based Wilbur-Ellis.

With the additional pet food protein source contaminated, the FDA is now sampling additional raw ingredients at the U.S. border that are coming from China, but it declined to say which ones. It is, however, sampling all wheat gluten and rice protein concentrates from China, it said.

Contaminated corn gluten was used to manufacture a pet food manufactured in South Africa, the FDA said, but it has no reason to believe that the product entered the United States.

The contaminated products have produced a repetitive stream of pet food recalls during the last month that have embroiled brands as varied as grocery store labels to Petco to Iams. Even smaller companies with a holistic bent, such as Natural Balance and Blue Buffalo have had pet foods recalled.

More pet food recalls are expected in the coming week as the FDA traces the remaining 155 metric tons of potentially contaminated rice protein gluten that was shipped by Wilbur-Ellis to five pet food companies.

Diamond Pet Foods and Blue Buffalo have already been identified as part of those five, but the FDA said it could not identify the remaining companies because of its ongoing investigation.

Seventeen of the 2,600 pet foods listed in the Davis Veterinary Consulting’s database contain rice protein concentrate, according to Sean Delaney, DVM, a founder of the company and an associate veterinary/assistant clinical professor at the University of California, Davis.

Companies use the concentrate to add a pure source of protein to a pet’s diet without adding other elements such as carbohydrates, he said.

There’s nothing inherently wrong with using wheat gluten or rice protein concentrate as an ingredient, he said.

Delaney, whose company offers consumers and pet food companies advice on creating pet diets, cautioned pet owners against turning cooking for their cats or dogs in the coming months.

“It’s really important that people realize that most pet foods are safe for animals,” he said. Trying to create a homemade formula could only make things worse, he said.

For more CatChannel articles on the pet food recall, [click here](#).