

## Is Your Dog Eating Poisoned Pet Food?

### Purina PetCare recalls pet food made in Venezuela

Excerpt from article by Mary Jo Feldstein of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch (02/19/2005)

Nestle Purina PetCare Co. of St. Louis voluntarily has recalled all of the pet-food products made at its plant in Venezuela after discovering toxins in the food, a spokesman said Friday. The problem is limited to Purina's La Encrucijada plant, its only facility in Venezuela. None of the food was sold in the United States. The recall includes about 10 brands; all the products are dry pet foods.

Nestle Purina PetCare discovered the problem after veterinarians contacted the food maker and complained of sick animals. The company launched an internal investigation and confirmed the problem on Feb. 3. Purina immediately stopped production and began the recall the next day, said spokesman Keith Schopp. The toxins, which are caused by mold, can lead to serious health problems and death in pets. Purina has yet to determine the underlying cause of the mold. "It's an extensive recall," Schopp said. "These toxins can cause severe liver problems and we needed to take action." Purina has yet to determine how much the recall will cost.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals found out about the incident on Tuesday and tried to contact the company. Mary Beth Sweetland, director of research and investigation at PETA, said there are tests that determine the presence of toxins in foods. "It seems to me this tragedy could have been caused by negligence," Sweetland said.

This isn't the first pet food recall that has hit the news since kibble first hit the grocery store shelves. Unfortunately, many pet owners who regularly feed processed dry food, are completely unaware of the dangers. As an avid proponent of raw feeding for pets, I am frequently amazed at the articles that surface warning of the bacteriological dangers of serving raw food to our pets. People are either unaware, or they forget, that processed pet foods carry with them as much, if not more, risk of contamination than do carefully prepared raw diets.

Mycotoxins are metabolic by-products of fungi that are toxic to both animals and humans. Mycotoxin contamination is most often found in wheat and wheat products, corn and corn products, soybean meal and hulls, barley, and oats. Mycotoxins can develop prior to harvest, between harvesting and drying, or during storage. Once produced, these toxins cannot be readily extracted from contaminated feed.

Pets who are fed a diet of processed food that has been contaminated with mycotoxins can display an alarming range of health problems, including cancer, liver disease, immune system deficiencies, reproductive problems such as lack of heat cycles and reduced sex drive. Mycotoxin contamination can also adversely affect fetal development in pregnant animals.

It has long been known that mycotoxin contamination is an issue with processed pet foods. Most pet food companies have screening procedures in place but, as this press release indicates, these procedures are by no means foolproof.

The possibility of your pet food being contaminated by mycotoxins is not limited to the processing plant. Even non-contaminated food can develop mycotoxins if left open for weeks. Every time you open a bag of pet food, you allow oxygen to get in. Oxidization of fats has been shown to cause cancer and other health problems in animals. Warm, moist air will cause mold to grow on the food. Mycotoxins are a by-product of this mold. Unless you buy small bags of food and keep them in the freezer, your processed pet food is at risk of causing your pet serious health problems.

If you're not convinced that a natural, raw diet is better for your pets, at least make their processed diet as safe as possible. Go to any Internet search engine and type in "mycotoxins in pet food." Learn about and practice the safest storage practices. Buy smaller bags and keep them closed, cool, and dry. If your pet suddenly turns his nose up at food that he previously ate – don't force him to eat it. He knows something you don't – that food is probably contaminated. Don't take any chances with your pet's health. The price of a new bag of food is cheap compared to the expense of vet visits and the anguish of knowing your pet has a serious health problem that could have been prevented. Be careful. Be informed. Be safe.

Laura Murphy  
Pets By Nature