

A PETS ADVISER

INVESTIGATION

NEW PET FOOD DANGERS



SPECIAL REPORT

A New Investigation into Chinese Ingredients in Pet Food

How the 2007 recall disaster can happen all over again.

by **Pets Adviser** updated Sept. 2012

In 2007, roughly 17,000 pets were sickened—and 4,200 dogs and cats died—from tainted pet food made with ingredients imported from China.

The apparent culprit? Melamine, a chemical made from coal that is used to make plastics. For years animal feed producers in China ground melamine into powder and mixed it into pet food. Why? Well, why else? To save money, of course. Melamine looks just like protein on inspectors' test results, so it's a cheap way to make the product look like it has more protein than it really does.

It is well known that China's food manufacturers operate in a culture of cutting corners and compromising safety. Corporations that use Chinese ingredients in their products, seeking ever more profits, seem perfectly happy to look the other way.

As dogs and cats in the United States began to die by the hundreds, and then thousands, the Food and Drug Administration issued a record recall of tainted pet foods: 60 million packages in all, spanning 150-plus brands. Some of the brands previously thought of as "premium" pet foods were also included in this massive recall, such as Eukanuba, Hill's Prescription Diet, Iams, Nutro, Royal Canin and Science Diet.

It can happen again

A similar pet food fiasco can happen again, and here's why.

In the past ten years, food imports to the United States from China have tripled, according to Food &



Water Watch, an environmental advocacy group. In fact, this growth is happening so quickly, on such a massive scale, that inspectors in China openly concede that they're unable to keep pace.

Think about this: Just 2 percent (or less) of food imported from China is ever inspected in the United States. That's right, 2 percent. That fact, according to Food & Water Watch's executive director Wenonah Hauter, "virtually guarantees that unsafe Chinese products are making their way into American grocery stores."

China supplies 70 percent of dog and cat food imports to the United States. To pick just one recent month alone, February 2011, nearly 8 million pounds of ingredients were sent over from China, bound straight for pet foods in America.

Maybe you thought the record 2007 pet food recall would be the end of melamine in pet food. Not exactly.

As recently as September 2011 the FDA found high levels of melamine in shipments of "gourmet" pet treats

from China. (Of course, there are many more examples, such as July 2010: melamine found in rawhide dog chews; August 2010: melamine in fish food; November 2010: melamine in an animal feed additive; January 2011: more melamine-tainted treats; and on and on...)

Goodbye melamine and hello leather—yes, leather

You've got to give Chinese producers a little credit. They're getting wise to the uproar over melamine, and they're discovering clever new ways of inserting dangerous fillers into the products. A hydrolyzed leather protein (made from scraps of cow skin) appears to be the new hidden additive of choice.

"When the melamine issue broke and everybody started being able to detect melamine," says Peter Leedham, a food testing executive based in China, "unscrupulous producers tried to find an alternative way...so what they used, very cleverly, was the hydrolyzate of bovine leather."

The leather may not hurt your dog or cat, but the curing chemicals used to make that leather certainly might. Leedham adds: "Because it's actually protein and derived from a cow, it's almost impossible to detect as an additive."

Mystery toxin in chicken jerky treats

For the past several years, there has been an ongoing outbreak of hundreds of sick and dying dogs and cats, which be caused by jerky pet treats that are being imported from China.

In all 360 dogs and one cat have died at the time of this writing. And believe it or not, as of late September 2012, the suspected products are STILL on store shelves!

Does your pet food have Chinese ingredients?

Your run-of-the-mill pet food very likely *does* have Chinese ingredients in the mix. It's up to you to decide if it's a risk you're willing to take.

But, as a new investigation by Pets Adviser reveals, you're not off the hook even if you're faithfully buying a high-end brand. The FDA does not require "country of origin" statements on pet food, and let's face it: U.S. manufacturers aren't going out of their way to blatantly advertise a China link to their "premium" food. In fact, because of regulatory loopholes, the package might even

proclaim, "Made in the USA," naturally leading you to think it's China-free when it's not. If you want to know the truth, you'll have to do some legwork: Call or e-mail the company and ask them outright.

Pets Adviser recently researched ten very high-quality dog food brands to try to determine how many of them contained ingredients sourced from China.

An investigation into 10 top-quality dog food brands

Pets Adviser sent an e-mail to the makers of the following products, which we consider to be some of today's "best of the best" of the commercial dry dog foods:

- Artemis Fresh Mix Maximal
- Blue Buffalo Wilderness Duck
- Canidae Grain Free pureSKY
- EVO Turkey & Chicken
- Go! Natural Grain Free Endurance Formula
- Nature's Variety Instinct Duck Meal & Turkey Meal
- Orijen 6 Fresh Fish with Sea Vegetables
- Taste of the Wild Wetlands with Roasted Fowl
- TimberWolf Wild & Natural Canid
- Wellness CORE Original

We asked them all, "*Can you please tell us if any of your ingredients are sourced from China?*"

Out of the ten, we heard back from seven of them. Three—Wellness CORE, TimberWolf and Nature's Variety—simply ignored our request for information.

Here's what Pets Adviser discovered, to our dismay: The vast majority of high-end commercial dog foods contain some portion of ingredients sourced from China. This finding demonstrates the industry-wide pervasiveness of the problem. If even top-shelf brands are affected, downmarket brands are that much worse off.

As revealed in our correspondence with the companies we researched, some pet food manufacturers are going out of their way to gloss over any link to China. The following is a sample of the responses:

1. Let's start with Artemis. They told us: "The only ingredient sourced from China is our vitamins/minerals. Many companies claim that their vitamins/minerals are from the U.S., but that is only partially true. The actual raw ingredients are usually sourced from China and then blended and sold in the U.S. through third-party U.S.-based companies. We do test all our prod-

ucts, and our company has never been involved in any type of recall.”

Likely translation: Yes, some of our ingredients come from China.

2. Now let's move on to Blue. Here's what they said first: “Many of our ingredients, such as our grains and meats, come from the USA, except for our lamb, which is free range from New Zealand. Where possible our suppliers are instructed to source their ingredients from the U.S. Where the ingredients are not readily available in the U.S., such as many vitamins, minerals and nutraceuticals, they work only with reputable foreign suppliers, and subject all ingredients to rigorous quality testing. All of our ingredients are USDA approved and inspected.”

Our reply: “Thanks for getting back to me; I really appreciate it. I was asking specifically about Chinese ingredients. From your response, I gather that it's safe to say that yes, some of the ingredients in BLUE products (certain vitamins and minerals) do in fact originate in China.”

And the response from Blue: “If an ingredient is not available in the United States we do not source directly from China, however, we cannot guarantee that a vitamin or mineral will never be sourced from that country.”

Likely translation: We can't help it if a third-party

supplier sources from China.

3. Next, we heard from Petcurean Pet Nutrition, makers of the Go! Natural line. They sent us a two-page boilerplate document of answers to frequently asked questions. Buried down at the bottom is this: “All of the meat proteins, grains, cereals, fruits & vegetables in our GO! and NOW products are sourced from North America (as close to the production facility as possible).”

If that sounds great to you, maybe you need to re-read it. Check out the very careful language. Pets Adviser sent a follow-up e-mail. Here's what we asked:

“I notice that the document says, ‘All of the meat proteins, grains, cereals, fruits & vegetables in our GO! and NOW products are sourced from North America.’ Of course that leaves out other ingredients that aren't meat proteins, grains, cereals, fruits and vegetables—like vitamins and minerals. Can you give me a straight yes or no if any of the ingredients in this product currently come from China?”

And Petcurean's reply?

“We purchase our vitamin and mineral premixes from a European supplier with very strict manufacturing and quality assurance programs in place. Most of the vitamins and minerals used in our formulations come from North America, however, on average, 1/100th of one percent of our total finished diets are

97% of pet owners get this one thing wrong. Do you?

That's right; there's one thing that 97% of pet owners get wrong: They don't get health insurance for their dog or cat.

MYTH 1: IT COSTS TOO MUCH! Not true. You can get basic coverage of your pet for a low monthly payment that's roughly the cost of a bag of pet food.

MYTH 2: BUT MY PET ISN'T SICK! Not relevant. All pets risk having an accident or coming down with an illness. It isn't a matter of if they will become hurt or sick; it's a matter of when. The best time to get pet insurance is when your pet is healthy.

MYTH 3: IT'S A BIG HASSLE. These days, this is definitely not true. Many companies offer a one-page downloadable claim form. Fill it out, email it back and get reimbursed in no time. This isn't 1980 anymore.

Dr. Phil Zeltzman, a well-known veterinary surgeon, tells Pets Adviser that NOT getting insurance is one of the biggest mistakes pet owners can ever make. He says:

“I think pet insurance is one of the greatest inventions out there.... If your pet ever needs life-saving care, you can have peace of mind knowing that you will be able to afford the care they need.”

We urge you to check out Embrace Pet Insurance, which is offering a free online quote. It's quick and easy.

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sourced from Asia as the only world-wide supply of certain essential vitamins is Asia.”

As you can see, some of the vitamins and minerals do actually come from China, even in a product that says “natural” right there in the name. Of course, Petcurean is so terrified of the connection that it dare not even say the word “China,” preferring instead to go with the generic “Asia.”

4. Now here’s what a representative from Diamond Pet Foods, makers of Taste of the Wild Wetlands, told us: “With regard to your question about China, I can certainly appreciate your question. While most of the ingredients originate in the U.S., there are a few ingredients, such as vitamins (i.e., ascorbic acid) which are needed and cannot be purchased outside of Asia.”

She went on to add that the ingredients are put through “strenuous testing” for toxins and to ensure top quality.

But is it true that some vitamins and minerals can come only from Asia? Well, not necessarily, according to yet another maker of high-quality dog foods:

5. Champion Pet Foods. Finally, we have a winner! Here’s what that company told us when we asked if Chinese vitamins are ever used in Orijen Six-Fish dog food:

“There are no ingredients from China used in the preparation of our dog and cat food formulas, including vitamins—we are 100% China-free.”

That’s by far the strongest-worded, most positive statement we received from any of the ten companies Pets Adviser contacted.

6. Contrast that with our experience with Canidae. We asked this company if its Grain-Free Pure Sky line has Chinese ingredients. They hit back with: “All Canidae and Felidae products are proudly made in the United States of America using the highest quality U.S. ingredients.” Hmm, okay, sure... But that actually doesn’t answer our question. Are there any ingredients (especially vitamins) that come from China at all? The

company did not respond.

7. Meanwhile, from Natura, makers of EVO dog foods, we got a brief, carefully worded e-mail: “We do not source any of our ingredients from China for any of our pet foods.” All right, that sounds good at first glance, but we wanted to ask a follow-up.

We said that other companies had told us that they’ll often use third-party-provided ingredients in the United States. Basically, it works like this: the third-party company is the one that sources the ingredients from China, then mixes it in with other stuff, and finally sells the bundled ingredients to companies in the United States. This way, guess what: the dog food companies can get away with claiming they didn’t source anything from China. Well, when we pointed this out to Natura, and asked if they used such third-party sourcing, the reply was even shorter than the first statement:

“We do not source any raw ingredients from China.”

Essentially, Natura seemed to pretend we never mentioned third-party companies. Based on that interaction, we’re simply not confident saying that’s a definite “no Chinese ingredients” in Natura’s EVO line. If we do learn more, Pets Adviser will certainly update this report, but for now, we can’t say one way or the other.

The three remaining brands—Wellness CORE, TimberWolf and Nature’s Variety—declined or ignored our request for information.

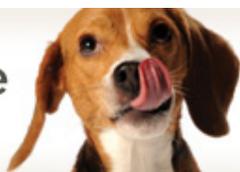
Conclusion

In summary, out of the ten companies we contacted, only one could be verified to source no ingredients from China: Champion Pet Foods (Orijen).

This, to us, is an eye-opening investigation, because these are top-notch dog foods in every other way.

Bottom line: *It’s only a matter of time before another massive pet food recall is triggered by deadly ingredients sourced from China. Find out if your chosen brand is in the clear—write the manufacturer for a straight answer.*

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