

Transcript of FDA Press Conference on the Pet Food Recall

March 19, 2007

FTS - HHS FDA

Moderator: Cathy McDermott

March 19, 2007

9:00 am CT

Coordinator: Welcome and thank you for standing at this time operative sence will be a listen and listen mode. To ask a question during the question and answer session please push star one on your touch tone phone. Today's conference is being recorded if you have any objections you may disconnect at this time please. Odell at this time Id like to turn this call over to Cathy McDermott. You may begin.

Cathy McDermott: Good afternoon this Cathy McDermott. I'm with the office of public affaires with the food and drug administration this call today will be providing an up date on the recall on pet foods from Menu Foods.

We have with us today a spokesperson Dr. Stephen Sundlof who is the director for FDA sensor for Veterinary Medicine, Mr. Dan McChesney the Director of the Office of Surveillance and Compliance at the office for Veterinary medicine. And Mr. David Elder as the office of enforcement for the FDA.

We would like to begin this call with a statement by Dr. Sundlof providing an update on the recall Dr. Sundlof.

Stephen Sundlof: Thank you. This is Dr Sundlof while we are still very early on in this investigation. I just want to bring up to date on what it is the FDA knows and what it is we are doing at this point.

A little background, on Friday Menu Foods Incorporated a private label pet manufacturer, in Streetville Ontario Canada recalled its cuts and gravy style dog and cat food produced at its facilities in Emporia Kansas, (Pensoka) New Jersey between the dates of December 3, 2006 and March 6, 2007.

FDA was first notified of this possible recall late Thursday afternoon last Thursday. The recall was prompted by consumer complaints received by the manufacturer and by tasting trials conducted by the manufacture, by which some cats and dogs developed kidney failure after eating the affected product.

To date we are aware of at least ten deaths one dog and nine cats that have been reported. We anticipate that those numbers will increase as the investigation continues.

The FDA is doing everything possible to identify the cause and the extent of the problem as quickly as possible including obtaining samples and reviewing the manufacturing process. FDA headquarters and FDA field offices are working with Menu Foods Incorporated to insure the effectiveness of the recall.

FDA toxicologists and veterinarians are working with the district office and trying to identify the cause of the kidney failure. Menu Foods Incorporated has identified the potentially contaminated product on the Internet, and that URL is www.menufoods.com/recall and consumers that have any of these products should immediately stop feeding them to their pets and return any UN opened products to the place of purchase.

Based on the information we have the problem is limited to those products identified by Menu Foods in the recall. However the investigation is still on

going and if we find the problem is broader we will get that information out as quickly as possible and with that statement I will open it up for questions and answers.

Cathy McDermott: And Danielle we would like if you would like to state your name and your affiliation.

Coordinator: Thank you to ask a question at this time please push the star one star and press star two to withdraw your question. To ask a question press star one. We have a question from (David Curley) at ABC News.

(David Curling): Hi there doctor, Menu has said that here is one ingredient that they have changed that is within the same time frame that these problems started coming up. What kind of toxin could have been in that ingredient and what was that ingredient.

Stephen Sundlof: The ingredient was wheat gluten, they did change manufactures according to the company. We are working with the company to investigate all of the substances that we recognize as being toxic to the kidney, at least the preliminary information that the company has gotten back indicates that there has been nothing positively identified of all of those substances that we think could be the likely cause of renal failure.

Just to let you know what some of those things are they are heavy metals like Cadmium, and Mercury, and Arsenic and Lead things like certain fungal toxins mold toxins if you will that are specifically toxic to the kidney, and other toxins and chemicals that are known specifically known to neurotoxin or toxic to the kidney.

(David Curling): And would any of those things be used to produce wheat gluten. I know mold probably isn't but some of the others possibility?

Stephen Sundlof: No and you thinking it's likely a contaminant that somehow got introduced into the process by mistake.

(David Curling): Thank you

Coordinator: Our next question goes to (Andy Richards) with Associated Press.

(Andy Richards): Thank you for taking my question. Did any of these cats or dog actually fall sick and die during these taste tests conducted by the company in which case would you have on hand the sample that theoretically contaminated.

Stephen Sundlof: Yes we have a small amount of the one sample the nine cats and one dog were in fact from the taste test trail. Those are the ones that we have confirmed at this time.

(Andy Richards): So the deaths occurred in animals that the company itself supplied food to?

Stephen Sundlof: Yes.

(Andy Richards): Ok, I'm sorry go on

Stephen Sundlof: We have obtained some of the samples there's not a lot but we are investigating doing laboratory test the FDA is doing additional laboratory test and we are working with the company to find out any additional information that they discover because of examining both the animals of postmortem and any findings that the received back from the laboratory.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from Abigail Goldman at The Los Angeles Times.

(Abigail Goldman): Good afternoon, thank you for taking my question. I have two actually
First to follow what you just said so none of the animals that have been confirmed dead as a result of this poisoning or of the containment actually came from the public? Isn't that number going up because were hearing from members of the public? That's question one.

Question two is if the contaminant came from a new supplier who does that supplier supply and doesn't that mean a possibility of a widening of contamination to other plants other than the ones we've been talking about in the Canadian owned company.

Stephen Sundlof: We are looking into that right now trying to find out where else that manufacture might have been selling the product. So that company is still currently being investigated.

We are aware that there have been complaints in fact I believe in late February many food companies received complaints from consumers and this is followed by the feeding the dog within the company for tasting purposes.

We are aware there have been others. We've been receiving the FDA has had a number of complaints we have not been able to confirm these numbers will change as time goes on.

(Abigail Goldman): Are you able to name the supplier involved?

Stephen Sundlof: I don't know what the name of the supplier is at this time.

(Abigail Goldman): Or how many other companies that supplier supplies that we can get an idea about the scope of the problem or how many other companies that supplier supplies.

Stephen Sundlof: I'm going to ask David Elder to respond to that.

David Elder: Good afternoon this is David Elder I can assure that that investigation is under way to determine her companies are supplied ingredients by the supplier but at this stage of the investigation we are not able to say much more than that.

Coordinator: Our next question is from (Julie Schmidt) from the US Today.

(Julie Schmidt): Yes this is clarification that the taste trial came after the company received consumer complaints.

Stephen Sundlof: I think the first complaint as we understand it the company received was on February 20th and on March 2nd the first of the palatability the tasting studies was the first death of cats at that time so they followed pretty closely.

(Julie Schmidt): Okay and just one other quick one. If we don't really know exactly what the problem is not even -- I mean we don't even know if the wheat gluten was the problem. How can we be sure that only the products identified by menu so far may be affected?

Stephen Sundlof: Well we know that all the death and the injuries reported so far fall within those dates of December 3 and March 6. So we have no indication that anything abnormal has happened outside of that.

Obviously if we do find that during our investigation we will expand the recall as appropriate but at this time I don't believe there is really cause for concern

since none of the reports that we have received so far would indicate a need for a wider recall.

(Julie Schmidt): Thank you.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Anna Crowley) with AWCNC.

(Anna Crowley): Thank you I have two questions. One is what should people do if they believe their animals are a victim. I realize there is an info line at the actual manual stock facture but should they call the FDA if they believe that their animal has died from kidney failure?

Stephen Sundlof: Yes and if there animal is sick then by all means they need to contact their veterinarian immediately because obviously this is a life threatening disease that requires immediate medical attention.

There is - if you go to the FDA Web site www.fda.gov and right up on the top is a pet food recall and people can click on that and that will take you to one of the links on the page that says -- it's a long thing but it says basically the FDA is conducting an investigation consumers who wish to report adverse actions can go to this particular site, it's a long URL but it has the complaint coordinators for every single state.

So if you're in Alabama you should be calling your state FDA complaint coordinator. If you're in another state all of those numbers are listed there in the Web site.

(Anna Crowley): The second one is the Web site traffic (unintelligible) has been unbelievable today and when you click on ions it's hard to actually get the information. Will the FDA be putting out a more straight forward list of the brands, the, you

know, all the particulars about it so that the consumer doesn't have to click on three different Web sites that may or may not be congested with web traffic?

Stephen Sundlof: Well it's news to me. I've just before this phone call went on the menu foods Web site and pulled down all the names of the products that were subject to recall so I guess if we find out that there is a problem that people are not able to get on the, you know, get this information we certainly could help with that but that hasn't at least we haven't heard that yet. Yours is the first notification.

(Anna Crowley): Okay and the third question is if the recall is based on these animals that died in a test trial are you certain that this wheat and millet from this particular supplier has not been in other products.

Because it just seems looking at it if you're testing a product and the animals die from the product that you're testing maybe if you were testing other products that had that same ingredient from the same supplier you might find the same result.

Stephen Sundlof: Yes, and I think as we discussed earlier we are trying to run that down right now to find out, you know, if there are any other products that this company has supplied products to and if we find that out then obviously we will take the appropriate action but at this time we're still trying to find out that information.

(Anna Crowley): Okay, thank you.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (William Stain) with Dow Jones your line is open.

(William Stain): Yes, thank you. A couple of things. What I wanted to know was when the last pet food recall was and the other is how long between the time that the animals digest this food and when they die?

Stephen Sundlof: I will answer the first question and I'm not sure on the second question but on the first question. We actually had a recall of pet food last month. We put up a notice on our home page again and it was a product that was a cat food that was a raw meat diet that was contaminated with salmonella and there were no complaints at that point.

It was just purely a routine test of the product and it was found to contain salmonella so there was a recall of that product. That was as recent as last month.

The one prior to that which was a large recall in December of 2005 and that was Diamond Pet Foods and the cause of the recall at that time was contamination with a mold toxin called aflatoxin.

(William Stain): Okay. Could you spell your name please?

Stephen Sundlof: Yes, its S-u-n-d-l-o-f and Stephen is spelled with a p-h.

(William Stain): Thank you.

Stephen Sundlof: I'm going to ask Dr. McChesney to respond to the how long after animals have been exposed do they suffer these effects.

Daniel McChesney: In the animals that were (unintelligible) so it was a matter of a day or a couple of days. At first the trial we fed the cats and dogs for three or four days

and saw the effects very shortly and the second trial they only fed two days and (unintelligible) happens very rapidly.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (David Curling) at ABC News.

(David Curling): Thank you again. Back to this wheat gluten and you say you're tracking it down. Wheat gluten is used in a ton of human food. Has this supplier supplied human food and are humans at risk for renal failure as well?

Stephen Sundlof: I think we checked on the Web site of that company and they indicate in their Web site that they only supply to animals, animal feed so there's no human product according to them. Again, we have to confirm this and check it out but at this point in time it appears that it's only supplied for animal usage.

(David Curling): Okay, this is the company you said you didn't know but you've been to their Web site.

Stephen Sundlof: We don't have confirmation on this one but if it's the one we think it is then that's what we've learned.

(David Curling): But if it's not that one could it be another company that's supplying the human food chain?

Stephen Sundlof: If I don't know which one it is I can't (unintelligible).

(David Curling): Are humans at risk?

Stephen Sundlof: Not that we believe. You know we have no reason to believe that that's the case.

David Elder: This is David Elder with Office of Regulatory Affairs. As I said earlier we are early in the investigation and we appreciate the question that's being asked about whether or not any other products are potentially affected and I can assure you that that's one of our highest priorities to make that determination and we're working very hard to make it and if anything else is affected the proper steps will be taken to assure human health or animal health.

(David Curling): Okay you guys are three days into this but there still isn't an answer, three working days.

Stephen Sundlof: That's right I mean we're getting information constantly that we're trying to put all the pieces together but as I indicated we're very early into this investigation and as new information becomes available we'll certainly let the world know about that.

But at this point it's still just, you know, a lot of information coming in and we're piecing it together as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Amy Burmbom) with CBS News.

(Amy Burmbom): Hi thanks for taking my question. I actually just want to follow-up on the wheat gluten. So so far you haven't been able to determine whether the change in manufacturer is a coincidence or the likely cause of this contaminant.

Stephen Sundlof: That's correct.

(Amy Burmbom): Okay but is it something -- are you focusing more closely on wheat gluten based on what the company's telling you or based on anything else. If you

could just talk a little bit about, you know, where the investigation is focusing?

Stephen Sundlof: Well we're focusing on all the ingredients in the pet food and so wheat gluten is obviously one of the components that is being tested but there are number of other components that we are trying to acquire now for instance vitamins and minerals that might be added to pet foods as well as any other ingredients so that we are looking at -- we'll be looking at the entire spectrum of ingredients that go in there.

I think, you know, we're obviously we want to look first at the -- what looks like from the investigation to be the most likely cause and at this point that looks like its wheat gluten but that may change as the investigation goes on.

(Amy Burmbom): Okay and then the second question was other than the ten test trial (unintelligible) do you have any sense of pets and pet owners that have been affected? Any sense of numbers and any way that you've been able to -- any way you can quantify that?

Stephen Sundlof: At this point in time the answer is no we, you know, as I indicated we have complaint coordinators in 50 states and we're trying to collate all of those at the same time the company is receiving information and at this time we haven't been able to put all that together.

(Amy Burmbom): Okay and just one last question. Is it only two plants that the products made at or what is it about the two plants?

Stephen Sundlof: Those are the only two plants that have used this wheat gluten in their manufacture. Now the Kansas City plant actually is where they, you know, the complaints have been coming about from products that they produce.

The New Jersey plant apparently there have been no, to our knowledge at this point, have not been complaints on any of the products produced at that plant. But because that plant used wheat gluten from the same source as the Kansas City plant we have included or the company has included that plant in the recall.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Sandra Epstein) with the Atlanta Journal (unintelligible).

(Sandra Epstein): Hi thanks for taking my questions. First of all can you tell us what people should look for symptoms in their pets?

Stephen Sundlof: Yes, anything abnormal but a lot of the preliminary signs of kidney disease are things like lethargy, loss of appetite and vomiting. Those are the main things to look for and if your pet has any of those signs and especially if they've been fed any of the products that are subject to recall they should contact their veterinarian immediately.

(Sandra Epstein): Now with the Diamond Pet Food recall the aflatoxin that caused liver failure and that was a wheat mold wasn't it?

Stephen Sundlof: That was a corn mold.

(Sandra Epstein): That was a corn mold okay. And so the aflatoxin would not be anything in this case.

Stephen Sundlof: Apparently there has been some screening for the aflatoxin and it has come up negative but no the symptoms don't look like aflatoxin.

(Sandra Epstein): And will the individual coordinators you said all 50 states have an FDA coordinator for this will they be able to give us the number because if we're trying to get it I'm sure all of us are interested for our areas how many people have called to complain. Where can we get those kinds of statistics?

Stephen Sundlof: Yes, I think let me ask the press office.

Laura Oliven: Yes, this is Laura Oliven in the press office. We would update any numbers that we receive as we receive them. They would come through the press office. It would come in the form of an updated press release.

(Sandra Epstein): Have we released any numbers yet as to the number of complaints that we've gotten from the public?

Stephen Sundlof: No we haven't -- again we haven't tallied all of those up yet.

(Sandra Epstein): All right, thank you.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Abigail Goldman) with Los Angeles Times.

(Abigail Goldman): Thank you for taking a follow-up. I appreciate what you're saying about working as fast as you can but if you are focused in on a supplier who may have supplied other companies yet you're not telling us about the other companies or the supplier so that people can follow-up.

How can people be assured that they are giving their pets food that isn't going to kill them? What is it that you'd like to say to the public about what they should be feeding their pets?

Stephen Sundlof: Well the only complaint we've heard so far has been associated with the products that are subject to recall so if there are other products there's no signals out there yet that we are aware of.

We are trying to follow-up on this wheat gluten to understand fully where it might have gone so that's something that, you know, we're just -- we're working on as fast as we can.

But the main, you know, our main efforts right now are to make sure that the recall is being conducted and is being conducted effectively so that's the main focus of our activities right now is to make sure that those products that are potentially dangerous to pets are off of the market and can't cause any further harm.

(Abigail Goldman): Is this the largest recall of pet foods? Or the largest recently? It seems like just from what you've mentioned and what I've seen that this would be the biggest?

Stephen Sundlof: I can't answer that at this point. The Diamond Pet Food recall that I talked about in late 2005 December 2005 was relatively large. I think it was over about half of the 50 states and some 26 or 27 different countries so it was very large as well. And so to date that was the largest one we've ever experienced. I don't know the full extent of this one.

(Abigail Goldman): Maybe there's a better way to ask that. These 80 brands what percentage of the total market does that encompass. I'm trying to get a sense of how big this is in terms of the pet food market.

Stephen Sundlof: The best number that we have and this is not something that we have confirmed but just in discussing it with the pet food industry it appears to be about 1% of all of the pet foods that are sold in the United States.

(Abigail Goldman): Thank you very much.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Michelle (unintelligible) at (unintelligible).

(Michelle): Actually my biggest question is the time frame when you will release the other potential foods that are affected?

Stephen Sundlof: At this point I don't know enough about the type of renal failure other than the fact that these animals apparently did go into renal failure. We don't know what the cause was so it's not possible at this point to determine whether or not it is reversible but certainly I think some animals have become ill and have recovered successfully.

So getting the dog or the cat to the veterinarian as soon as possible even without knowing the exact cause they can be supported until they can recover if they're not too severely affected.

So I think the message we want to get out to the public is if you see any of these signs like lethargy, loss of appetite, vomiting and you know that your pet has consumed one of these products they really need to get to the veterinarian immediately.

Thanks very much.

Cathy McDermott: Hi this is Cathy McDermott again this will conclude our call. Thank you to all who participated today we will be putting out updates whether it be on

our Web site so please continue to access that or another press release if appropriate as soon as we get more information and more updated information. Thank you.

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