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## Deadly pet food recalled

Eighteen brands of dog and cat food, widely distributed throughout 23 states, have been recalled because of possible contamination with a potent toxic fungus known as aflatoxin.

As of January 11, there had been 23 confirmed and 53 unconfirmed dog deaths and 23 illnesses linked to tainted food made at Diamond Pet Food's manufacturing plant in Gaston, S.C., according to Rae Jones, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Jones said the FDA's investigation into the problem is ongoing.

Aflatoxin is a naturally occurring toxic chemical byproduct from the growth of the fungus *Aspergillus flavus* on certain crops, particularly corn, tree nuts, and peanuts. The fungus is apt to develop during years with severe high temperatures and drought. The suspect pet food was formulated with corn.

Carol Anderson, a spokeswoman for Diamond, said the recall involves an estimated 800,000 bags of food, though only about 2 percent of the products are believed to be contaminated with aflatoxin, which can cause severe liver damage in pets. The company's products are sold mostly at independent pet food stores, as well as farm and feed retail outlets. They are also sold in limited quantities by large pet-food retailers.

Symptoms of aflatoxin contamination are not always easy to discern and can mimic those of other medical conditions. They include sluggishness or lethargy; loss of appetite; jaundice that causes a yellowish tint to the eyes, gums, or belly area (where the hair is very thin); discolored urine; severe, persistent vomiting combined with bloody diarrhea; and fever.

To accurately diagnose liver failure in dogs, Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine has developed protein blood tests, originally designed for humans but adapted for canines, said Blaine Friedlander Jr., assistant director of press relations at Cornell. Friedlander said that experts are concerned that the public, including kennel owners, remains largely unaware of the tainted pet food and that dogs are continuing to be fed food containing a lethal toxin.

Friedlander is urging owners to have their veterinarians examine at-risk pets and inform him or her of the availability of Cornell's Protein C and Antithrombin Activity Assays to detect liver damage in seriously poisoned dogs. Veterinarians--not pet owners--can contact the university's Animal Health Diagnostic Center at 607-253-3900 for instructions on sending blood, tissue, liver, and food samples for analysis. The center is also tracking dogs that have died and following up on the health of survivors to assess the problem, help develop solutions, and share useful information with veterinary professionals and the public, Friedlander said.

### THE PRODUCTS INVOLVED

The recalled pet food was sold in 4- to 55-pound bags throughout the eastern half of the U.S., under the following brand names: Diamond Premium Adult Dog Food; Diamond Hi-Energy Dog Food; Diamond Maintenance Dog Food; Diamond Professional for Adult Dogs; Diamond Performance Dog Food; Diamond Puppy Food; Diamond Low Fat Dog Food; Diamond Maintenance Cat Food; Diamond Professional Cat Food; Country Value Puppy; Country Value Adult Dog Food; Country Value High Energy Dog Food; Country Value Adult Cat Food; Professional Chicken & Rice Adult Dog Food; Professional Puppy Food; Professional Large-Breed Puppy Food; Professional Reduced Fat Cat Food; Professional Adult Cat Food.

The brands were distributed to stores in Ala., Conn., Del., Fla., Ga., Ky., Maine, Md., Mass., Mich., Miss., N.H., N.J., N.Y., N.C., Ohio, Pa., R.I., S.C., Tenn., Vt., Va., and W.Va.

Recalled products can be identified by the date code and "Best by" dates listed on the back of the package. On 18- to 55-pound bags, there's a G (a reference to the Gaston plant) in the 11th or 12th position of the date code; on 4- to 8-pound bags, the G is in the ninth position. All affected bags have a "Best by" date between March 1, 2007, and June 10, 2007.

### WHAT TO DO

Pets that have eaten any of the suspect food might not exhibit symptoms right away and should be monitored for 7 to 12 days.

If your pet shows signs of illness, contact your veterinarian immediately and urge the vet to run a liver profile. Don't forget to mention the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine as a resource.

Consumers can return any unused portion of the pet food to the place of purchase for a refund. Diamond Pet Food is asking anyone whose pet consumed food from the suspect lots to save one or two cups for testing and analysis.

For more details, call Diamond's Customer Information Center at 866-214-6945 or go to [www.diamondpet.com](http://www.diamondpet.com).

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