



Recall of Peanut Products: Guidance for Supermarkets and Groceries

RISK ALERT

FEBRUARY 2009 NUMBER 26

A nationwide outbreak of salmonella that has sickened hundreds of people and has been implicated in several deaths has been traced to contaminated peanut products processed by the Peanut Corporation of America (PCA), at its plant in Blakely, Georgia, and possibly at other PCA plants, as well. The products are contaminated with *Salmonella typhimurium*, which causes diarrhea, vomiting, cramps and fever. Severe cases can be deadly, especially to young and old people, or those with weak immune systems.

As a result, all food products made with peanut products handled by PCA since January 1, 2007, have been recalled and should be destroyed. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) maintains a list of recalled products, which now includes brownies, cakes, pies, candy, cookies, crackers, donuts, fruit and vegetables, ice cream, pet foods, pre-packaged meals, snack bars, snack mixes, toppings, peanut paste, peanut butter, and whole peanuts.

Although PCA processes only about one percent of all peanut products sold in the United States, the number of affected foods is staggering: as many as a thousand different products from about a hundred suppliers are affected. These food products are sold in stores across the U.S. and beyond.

How Does the Recall Affect Grocery Stores?

The scope of the recall has created an extremely challenging situation for all food retailers: groceries and supermarkets, of course, but also convenience and liquor stores, snack machine vendors, and any other businesses that provide processed foods directly to consumers. The challenge lies in keeping up with the flood of recalls issued by food manufacturers, removing affected products from the retail stream, and communicating with customers. Several important resources are listed at the bottom of this page.

The recall includes products from as far back as 2007, and many of these products have a long shelf life; thus, affected products might linger in storage facilities and on grocery shelves for many weeks or months. Retailers must act quickly to get these products out of the retail stream.

What Should Food Retailers Do Right Now?

Stop Selling Recalled Products

- Find out what products have been recalled. Sign up for notifications from the FDA (see below).
- Stop selling recalled products immediately. Program the store's computer system so that all sales of targeted products are blocked at the registers.
- Remove products from shelves and from storage immediately. Isolate inventory of recalled products, pending destruction or return to manufacturer.
- Cancel orders of affected products; check on in-transit shipments; return targeted products when they arrive.

- Discard, destroy, or return contaminated products, as directed by suppliers or the FDA.
- Implement procedures for returns and refunds for products already sold to your customers.
- Maintain accurate records of affected inventory and any actions you have taken in this matter.

Communicate with Customers

- Post signs to inform store customers about the recall, indicating which of your products were affected, how you are responding, and what consumers should do with recalled products (return, discard, etc.). Include relevant contact information; consider tear-off sheets with toll-free numbers and/or web addresses.
- If possible, communicate directly with individual customers to inform them of the recall and of any affected products they may have purchased. Several retailers that offer customer loyalty cards are using those databases to contact customers via automated phone calls, email, or postal mail.
- Issue a news release to area media outlets to alert the community of the recall, your response to it, instructions for returning or discarding affected products, and relevant contact information.
- Purchase advertising space in local print media to communicate the same information.
- Use your company website to communicate the same information (with frequent updates) and to provide links to FDA, CPSC, and other key sources of information.
- If your store has *not* sold any of the affected products, let your customers know, using the same methods described above. At the very least, post a sign in a prominent location in each store.

For More Information

The FDA maintains a *dedicated web page* on this topic: www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/hottopics/salmonellatyph.html#news

The FDA provides a *browsable database* of peanut recalls, searchable by brand name, UPC code, and/or product description:

www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/peanutbutterrecall/index.cfm

FDA provides an *automatically updated widget* that retailers and others can embed in their Web sites to provide updates::

www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/hottopics/salmonellatyph/widget.html

FDA and CDC offer *updates* via Twitter, RSS, e-mail, etc. www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/

A *dedicated blog* combines relevant news from several government agencies: <http://pbrecallblog.hhs.gov/>

People who do not have Internet access can get the same information by calling FDA's information line at 1-888-SAFEFOOD or a similar information line at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at 1-800-CDC-INFO.