

Commissioner Andrew von Eschenbach

U. S. Food and Drug Administration
5600 Fishers Lane; Rockville MD 20857-0001
ph: 301-827-2410; email: andrew.voneschenbach@fda.hhs.gov

CC:

Daniel G. McChesney, Ph.D., Director
Food and Drug Administration, Center for Veterinary Medicine
Office of Surveillance and Compliance
7500 Standish Pl., HFV-230; Rockville, MD 20855
ph: 240-453-6830; fax: 240-453-6880
email: daniel.mcchesney@fda.hhs.gov

Dear FDA Commissioner von Eschenbach,

Cats and dogs are domesticated animals reliant upon our care. The largest (and still expanding) pet food recall in history is more than a "pet crisis." It is also a human crisis for over 100 million households where animals live as family members.

Until recently, the FDA minimized confirmed deaths due to food additives tainted with melamine (an element in plastics and fertilizer). At PetConnection.com, a self-reporting, veterinarian sponsored website, 4,800 deaths (2,499 cats and 2,301 dogs) were listed as of May 7, 2007. Full tally of sick or dead pets recorded by this date: 14,553.

This catastrophe exposes the vulnerability of our food supply and the Bush Administration and FDA's failure to safeguard, report, inspect and communicate. Now that melamine has been found in animals farmed for human consumption, the government may finally increase FDA authority and funding. I am pleased to learn the Senate recently passed a measure that identifies consistent standards for pet foods and fines for manufacturers that neglect to report faulty products.

Menu Foods, the initial pet food maker named in the recall, became aware of contaminated goods by February 20, 2007. But public recalls were not issued until March 16. During those three weeks, unsuspecting caretakers continued to *poison* beloved animals.

Reporting delays are unacceptable. I call upon the FDA to stipulate prompt reporting and enforce penalties for companies that do not comply.

In addition, I urge the FDA to step-up pet food inspections. Less than one-third of pet food plants underwent FDA inspections in the last three and half years. Unbelievably, the FDA had *never* inspected Menu Foods — the manufacturer behind some 90% of pet food brands. I respectfully insist the FDA standardize inspection rules for pet food plants nationwide.

Finally, the FDA must launch a more coherent system for information gathering, so veterinarians and animal caretakers can notify the agency without as many bureaucratic obstacles.

The latest survey from American Pet Products Manufacturers Association shows 73 million dogs and 90 million cats share homes with humans. Our companions count. Caretakers deserve timely, credible facts so they can protect animals from disease and death.

I hope this tragedy will impel the FDA to revamp its oversight of the pet food industry.

Thank you,