Effects of the Peanut Recall on a Confectionery Manufacturer

Lessons can be learned that will help the food industry become safer and prevent another recall.

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On November 25, 2008, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), working with state and local partners, began an epidemiological assessment of a cluster of salmonella cases reported from 12 states. I remember reading about this but at the time I had no idea of the widespread effect it would have on the confectionery and food industries. It would take six more weeks to determine the cause, but once the cause was found things moved very quickly.

TIMELINE OF THE ASSESSMENT

January 7, 2009: CDC reports 388 people infected with Salmonella typhimurium in 42 states; CDC, Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Minnesota Department of Health participate in a conference call to discuss peanut butter as a possible source of the outbreak and within a week the situation explodes.

January 8, 2009: Based on preliminary data from CDC and an investigation by the Minnesota Department of Health, the FDA initiates inspection and collects samples at peanut butter distributor King Nut. The FDA determines that the manufacturer of King Nut brand peanut butter is Peanut Corporation of America (PCA) in Blakely, Georgia.

January 9, 2009: FDA initiates inspection and sample collections over the course of 14 days with six investigators onsite at PCA’s Blakely facility, and continues to follow the distribution points for products. PCA ceases production and shipment of peanut paste and peanut butter.

January 10, 2009: King Nut announces a recall of peanut butter distributed under the King Nut and Parnell’s Pride labels; the Minnesota departments of Agriculture and Health isolate the outbreak strain of Salmonella typhimurium from an open 5-pound container of King Nut brand creamy peanut butter.

January 12, 2009: The FDA collaborates with CDC, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and state public health officials to investigate a multistate outbreak of infections due to Salmonella typhimurium; FDA begins to post company press releases about recalls on its website. Four days after the FDA arrived at their doorstep, PCA announces a voluntary recall of 21 specific lots of peanut butter and peanut paste produced at their Blakely facility on or after July 1, 2008. It would be the first of many.

“We are urging people not to eat products that have peanut butter until we have better information and they can make an