



February 3, 2009

An Open Letter to Food Retailers About Preventing Foodborne Illnesses

Dear Retailer,

We are writing with an urgent request. Many retail chains have the ability to take immediate action to protect their customers from foodborne illness by contacting them directly when a product they purchased is part of a recall. We ask that you take immediate action to alert all customers who belong to your loyalty program and who have purchased items involved in the nationwide recall of peanut-containing products.

Almost 900 products have been implicated in this recall of peanut products, making it one of the largest in U.S. history. The number and diversity of products is staggering, and their long shelf-life makes them a particular hazard to those who have them in their pantry for months to come. To date, over 550 consumers have already been sickened and eight died due to the contamination—and the outbreak continues.

Retailers could routinely notify their customers of all Class 1 recalls – those involving an immediate threat to health – if they purchased the recalled product. Stores could communicate via phone calls, e-mails, or letters noting the specific products purchased and directing customers to discard or return the product for a refund. Using modern tools to notify consumers could spare your customers serious illnesses or even death.

We applaud those companies, like Costco and Wegmans Food Markets, that already issue these food safety alerts. Costco alone has already contacted over 1.5 million customers by phone, and even more by mail, in response to the peanut recall.

Consumer confidence in the safety of our food supply has been sorely shaken in the wake of high-profile outbreaks due to spinach, tomatoes, ground beef, pet food, peanut butter, and many other products. We hope your company will do its part to protect your customers' health and help restore their confidence in the food supply.

Sincerely,

Michael F. Jacobson, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Sarah Klein
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