



How Safe Are Your Supplements?

At a time when many people are more aware of food origins and handling protocols, horse and pet owners are asking themselves "are my supplements safe?"

by Hilary Self

In 2007 American pet owners were horrified to discover the pet food they had been giving their dogs and cats was contaminated with an industrial chemical called Melamine

How can an industrial chemical get into pet food?

Melamine, a chemical found in plastics, glues and fertilizers, is a tasteless white powder, two-thirds of which is Nitrogen. When Melamine is added to feed protein sources such as wheat, maize or rice gluten, it increases the nitrogen levels, which in turn produces a falsely high protein level when the feed is tested.

You may say, "That's not a problem, I only feed my animals the more expensive brands of pet food, not the cheaper value brands; the food is bound to be safe!" Sorry to disillusion you, but some of the most expensive and "respected" foods, including those available only through vets, were found to contain binding agents such as wheat gluten from China.

As a result of the contamination by melamine and cyanuric acid, thousands of dogs and cats in the USA fell ill, and it is conservatively estimated over 1500 animals died as a direct result of the contamination. The FDA reported more than 8,500 calls relating to contaminated pet food. Autopsy reports of animals that died showed these cats and dogs had died from kidney failure. Melamine builds up in the kidneys like kidney stones and the animals cannot pass them.

In light of this episode, how can we be confident that the supplements we feed our animals and pets are "fit for purpose"?

STANDARDS NEEDED

Back in 2002 a group of American horse and pet supplement manufacturers formed an association to help set up a dialogue with US government bodies such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Association of Animal Feed Control Officials? (AAFCO) because their businesses were threatened by complicated and erratic regulations being enforced by these government agencies.

The association is the National Animal Supplement Council (NASC), formed to "improve and standardize the animal health supplement industry." To this end the NASC introduced its Quality Seal Program, whereby member companies are required

to undergo a full facility audit to ensure the company complies with a set of rigorous standards for Quality Control, Adverse Event Reporting and product labeling (including warning and cautionary statements recommended by the FDA's veterinary medicines center and the NASC's own Scientific Advisory Committee).



Only NASC member companies who have successfully passed the organization's audit are permitted to display the NASC Quality Seal badge on their product labels. The NASC boasts a membership of 100 companies representing over 90% of America's animal supplements industry with members from the US, the UK and Canada.

