



WAL-MART AND CONSUMER SAFETY



As the world's largest company and the nation's leading grocer, Wal-Mart's actions have a tremendous impact on the health and safety of Americans. While it squeezes suppliers to get the lowest costs for products, Wal-Mart neglects to ensure that those products are safe. Low prices should not be offered at the expense of consumer safety. Wal-Mart's track record is not trustworthy as highlighted briefly below.

Food Safety

Wal-Mart Sells Tainted Peanut Butter. Wal-Mart's Great Value brand of Peanut Butter is found to be contaminated with Salmonella. The Peanut Butter, which was produced by ConAgra foods, sickened hundreds of people – many of them children.¹

Tainted Pet Food Found in Wal-Mart Stores. The first discovery of hazardous pet food came at a Wal-Mart store. Produced by Menu Foods and containing the harmful chemical melamine, this food resulted in the death of many cats and dogs. Wal-Mart did not immediately pull the pet food from store shelves, and there were reports that Wal-Mart was restocking the contaminated pet food on store shelves at night.²

Wal-Mart Pulls Contaminated Catfish. Wal-Mart pulls contaminated catfish from its shelves after Alabama officials notify the giant retailer that it contains a banned antibiotic. The frozen catfish originated from China.³

Cut Flowers

Wal-Mart, The Largest Retailer Of Cut Flowers In The United States, Sells Pesticide-Tainted Flowers. The cut flowers found in Wal-Mart stores, primarily supplied by Dole from countries like Columbia and China, often contain pesticide residues 50 times what is allowed on food, as well as many pesticides that have been banned in North America because of the dangers they pose to human health and the environment.⁴

Lack of Regulatory Oversight and Consolidation:

Lack of Oversight Means A Steady Stream Of Contaminated Goods Will Continue To United States. The Consumer Product Safety Commission in 2004 entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with China, which significantly limited regulatory oversight of toys, cloths and other goods coming into North America. These regulatory guidelines suggest, however do not require, testing by suppliers and retailers.⁸

Wal-Mart Relies on Customer Complaints After The Fact. Wal-Mart is part of a voluntary reporting program with the CPSC that is based on customer complaints to Wal-Mart stores. This does call into question the preventative measures that could be taken to make sure these products do not reach consumers hands before they arrive on shelves and the amount of testing that is conducted on these products.⁹

Wal-Mart Indirectly Lobbies Against Food Inspections. Through the Food Marketing Institute, Wal-Mart has lobbied against legislation that would increase inspections of imported food and increase transparency of shipments handled by food manufacturers and processors. ConAgra, a leading supplier for Wal-Mart, was also a vocal opponent of this legislation. It is estimated that the FDA currently only inspects 1.3% of food imports, and a significant amount of this food comes from countries with spotty food safety records.¹⁰



Wal-Mart Openly Opposes Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) for food products. From Wal-Mart's own website: "As the world's largest retailer...we buy products from more than 60,000 suppliers in 70 countries." As the country's largest grocer, Wal-Mart follows the same practices, purchasing the majority of its food products from overseas. Labeling all these items will be costly and labor-intensive for Wal-Mart, but ultimately in the consumer's best interest.¹¹

2000-2004: Wal-Mart contributes more money to COOL opponents' campaigns than any other company in the United States:¹²

CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS TO COOL OPPONENTS, 2000-2004			
	Grand Total	Total Hard \$	Total Soft \$
Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.	\$3,459,102	\$3,085,102	\$375,722
Food Marketing Institute	\$1,571,252	\$970,353	\$600,899
National Cattleman's Beef	\$1,144,505	\$1,130,161	\$14,344
ConAgra Foods, Inc.	\$847,765	\$646,215	\$201,550
Smithfield Foods, Inc.	\$836,050	\$186,050	\$650,000

Toys and Clothing

Wal-Mart Bibs Contain Lead. Vinyl (PVC) Baby Bibs at Wal-Mart found contaminated with lead. Wal-Mart recalls a product it sold since 2004 with pressure from Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan.⁵

After Warnings, Wal-Mart Continues To Sell Toxic Toys. PIRGs Trouble in "Toyland Study" and "World Against Toys Causing Harm" annually cites Wal-Mart for the toxic and hazardous toys they carry on store shelves. Many of these toys present hazards from PVC, choking or laceration.⁶

Wal-Mart and Consumer Testing Lab:

Wal-Mart Uses Independent Lab To Test Products. Consumer Testing Lab is the laboratory Wal-Mart uses to test its products for safety. While they are based out of Massachusetts, they maintain a massive facility in Bentonville, Arkansas testing food and other products.⁷

Endnotes

- 1 Mark Huffman, "ConAgra Recalls Tainted Peanut Butter", ConsumerAffairs.com, February 27, 2007. http://www.consumeraffairs.com/news04/2007/02/peanut_butter_recall04.html
- 2 David Bracken and Michael Biesecker "Pet Owners on Quest for Safe Food," *The News and Observer*, April 7, 2007, April 11, 2007 <http://www.newsobserver.com/110/story/561741.html>
- 3 Stephen Nohlgren "Wal-Mart Removes Chinese Catfish Nationwide After Alabama Bans Sales", *St. Petersburg Times*, April 26, 2007 http://www.columbusdispatch.com/dispatch/content/national_world/stories/2007/04/26/catfish.html
- 4 Matthew Heller "Pretty Toxic," *Conscious Choice*, May 2006, <http://www.consciouschoice.com/2006/05/prettytoxic0605.html>
And The Green Guide Staff "Chocolate SSC: Better Blooms, Bon-Bons, Fine Wines and Java," *The National Geographic Green Guide*, January 25, 2006 http://www.ag.state.il.us/pressroom/2007_05/20070502.html
- 5 <http://www.uspirg.org/issues/toy-safety>; www.toysafety.org/
- 6 <http://www.walmartstores.com/GlobalWMStoresWeb/navigate.do?catg=331>
- 7 <http://www.cpsc.gov/BUSINFO/China/china.html>
- 8 http://www.pogolaw.com/files/news-alerts/2066/CPSC+Retailer+Reporting_10.06.pdf
- 10 Robert Pear "Food Industry's Resistance Stalls Bill To Protect Food," *New York Times*, April 16, 2002 <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?sec=health&res=9A03E1DA113CF935A25757C0A9649C8B63>, also read our report on Food Consolidation; Andrew Bridges "Imported Food Rarely Inspected", *Denver Post*, 4/16/2007
- 11 <http://walmartfacts.com/newsdesk/statementspeeches.aspx?categoryID=290#a1822> (note: Wal-Mart has removed the original page from its site.), Also read our report on Country of Origin Labeling; <http://walmartfacts.com/newsdesk/statement-speeches.aspx?categoryID=290#a1822>
- 12 "Tabled Labels: Consumers Eat Blind While Congress Feasts on Campaign Cash," *Public Citizen*. p 17