

Tainted Toothpaste Puts Sheffield In High Gear

Orders at NL company surge after bad product is found in some stores

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New Lon Officials at Sheffield Pharmaceuticals said Monday that their New London manufacturing plant has been deluged with orders since reports surfaced last week about tainted foreign toothpaste found on store shelves in Connecticut.

Ana de Oliveira, vice president of operations for the company, said she didn't have specific numbers, but the company has run out of product on at least two of its slower-moving toothpaste lines, and it was boosting production to keep up with demand.

Toothpaste accounts for about 25 percent of Sheffield's sales. The manufacturing plant, which traces its roots in New London back to 1850, makes a variety of pharmaceutical and cosmetic creams, ointments and toothpastes.

"We have been inundated with phone calls," de Oliveira said. The phone calls have come from customers concerned about the quality of the toothpaste manufactured at Sheffield, as well as from companies looking for products to replace the more than 1,100 tubes of tainted toothpaste pulled from store shelves by inspectors for the state Department of Consumer Protection.

By Friday, inspectors had confiscated 430 tubes of counterfeit Colgate purportedly made in South Africa and 275 tubes of a product made in China. The toothpastes contain diethylene glycol, a chemical commonly found in antifreeze that can cause kidney and liver damage, or even death. It is believed that small amounts were used as a sweetener in the toothpaste from China.

By late Monday, 410 more units of tainted toothpaste had been pulled off shelves, primarily in Hartford, Southington, New Britain and central Connecticut. So far, six stores in Hartford, West Hartford, Waterbury, Derby and North Branford have been found with counterfeit Colgate toothpaste and products marketed with the labels Dentakleen and Dentakleen Junior strawberry and blueberry flavor. The brands include names such as Cooldent, Dr. Cool, Everfresh, Superdent and Oral Bright, state Attorney General Richard Blumenthal said.

Dollar and discount stores have been the main focus of state investigators. An inspection by The Day of various dollar-type discount stores in East Lyme, New London and Groton on Monday found no suspect toothpaste.

Claudette Carveth, the Department of Consumer Protection's director of communications, said that as of noon Monday no tainted toothpaste had been found in New London County, although regulators had not finished checking area stores.

State officials listed MS USA Trading Inc. of New Jersey and TBS Asian Food of Danbury as the toothpaste's distributors. Reached by phone on Monday, Than Tha Khotosombath who said he was the owner of TBS Asian said the firm had thrown away some toothpaste "because it was no good." He could not say what brand it was and claimed the toothpaste was from Thailand. State officials said TBS Asian had been cooperative, but Khotosombath said he had not heard from either the attorney general or the Department of Consumer Protection.

"No store or home should have these poisonous products, laced with a mislabeled industrial antifreeze ingredient," said Blumenthal. "For toothpaste and other products 'Made in China' should be a warning label."

De Oliveira said worries among customers led Sheffield to retest its toothpaste line to determine the safety of the company's products. The company's Web site, www.sheffield-pharmaceuticals.com, assures clients that its products meet all regulatory codes and that its glycerin formula is manufactured in Indonesia, not China.

Sheffield in recent years has been facing increased competition from Mexico, India, South Korea and China as the cheap, foreign-made products sought to fill a niche in America's dollar stores, which represents about 10 percent of Sheffield's business, de Oliveira said. Even before the glycerin scare, dollar stores had been reaching out to Sheffield looking for quality products, she added, but in the panic following the toothpaste scare the trend has accelerated.

"We're getting a surge from dollar stores," said de Oliveira.

Jerry Farrell Jr., commissioner of the Department of Consumer Protection, urged consumers to check their tubes of toothpaste and to destroy any suspect products if necessary.

Consumers are urged to call 1-800-842-2649 if they come across the products on store shelves, and the department will embargo or seize them. A Web site, www.ct.gov/dcp, will list specific stores and suspect products as they are discovered.

De Oliveira said Sheffield regularly tests its products at several independent laboratories. Products are tested for stability, activity level, color, texture, smell and effectiveness, among other qualities. Some of its products go through the additional step of being approved by the American Dental Association.

Sheffield products are sold at Wal-Mart, Target, Family Dollar and Dollar General stores, among others. They are marketed in 49 different countries under various labels.

"Other countries want U.S.-made products," said de Oliveira, whose company formerly was known as Sheffield Laboratories and Sheffield Tube, named after the inventor of toothpaste, Dr. Washington Wentworth Sheffield. "We offer quality products, and with that comes a price."

New London



Sean Elliot - *A Sheffield Pharmaceuticals employee monitors one of the production lines at the New London company's Broad Street facility.*