



The **Anaphylaxis** campaign
Helping people with severe allergies live their lives

Nut contamination incident

In July 2007, deliberate nut contamination was suspected at a Pork Farms nut-free site. The company has kindly shared this report of the incident in the hope that other companies can learn from their experience.

Outline of the issue:

The site manufactures own-label product for three major UK retailers and has a responsibility to ensure that all products made are safe to eat.

We are a declared nut-free site but during the day of 12th July 2007 a number of peanuts were seen, and reported by staff, in locker room areas around the site.

At 15.30hrs peanuts were seen in two manufacturing areas of the site and the decision was taken to immediately stop production and to remove staff from the factory floor.

The senior team then assessed the situation in the factory and more nuts were found. At this point all stock on site was quarantined and retail customers were contacted and appraised of the situation.

Due to the potentially fatal risk to consumers of nut contaminated products production was suspended until all stakeholders could review the situation.

Representatives of our retailers were on site on 13th July and a decision made to withdraw all products from shelf, completely clean the factory and throw away any raw materials and product remaining on site whose integrity could have been compromised, e.g. raw materials that had been decanted from sealed bags into open trays.

In all the factory was shut down for three days and the cost to the business was £1.2m. Our retail customers praised the site management team for the way the situation was managed.

It was suspected that an employee was responsible for spreading the nuts around the site. The police did arrest an employee, who was charged, but this person was acquitted at trial as the jury couldn't reach a unanimous decision.

The company is still of the opinion that the contamination was a deliberate act by someone.

Our learnings from the incident are as follows:

- Managing entry points to site. We now have one staff entrance that is manned by security staff 24/7. Staff have to swipe an ID card to gain access so we know exactly who is on site and when.
- All staff are searched when entering site. Should staff want to bring anything on to site e.g. food, newspapers etc, they have to use a clear polythene bag so security staff can examine it quickly and effectively.
- CCTV – we have increased our CCTV coverage in manufacturing areas. These do not cover 100% of the site but enable us to know who was in what area and at what time.
- Secure perimeter. We now have a 6ft fence around the complete site. There is only one entrance for staff and cars. There is one other security monitored entrance for deliveries.
- Visitors to site have their bags/briefcases searched and sign disclaimers before they are allowed on site
- Staff are regularly briefed (weekly, monthly quarterly) so that they are fully aware of all news affecting them and take an active responsibility in the safe running of the organisation.
- It was decided that a third party security assessment of the site should be undertaken by a specialist organisation. As a senior management team we thought that the levels of security on site were adequate before we had the nut incident.

Conclusions:

- If somebody is determined to contaminate product then it will be difficult to stop them. However, the risk can be managed to acceptable levels by taking the actions outlined above