

Pedigree sued by dog owners

BARKING MAD: If your beloved pet died of renal failure after eating tainted food, maybe you too would feel entitled to a payment of US\$100,000 By Chiu Yu-Tzu, STAFF REPORTER , Friday, Jul 02, 2004, Page 2.

An international class-action suit stemming from the deaths of thousands of dogs in Asian countries, including Taiwan, was filed against Pedigree, a US maker of dog food, in US Federal Court in early May, the Care for Animals and Protect the Earth Organization said yesterday.

Shen Jung-chen, founder of the association, said that a correlation between certain questionable batches of Pedigree dog food manufactured in Thailand and numerous cases of kidney failure among dogs in Taiwan early this year had been indirectly confirmed.

At a press conference, Shen said that component analysis of questionable Pedigree dog food done by experts for the Council of Agriculture in March showed that certain toxic chemicals existed.

Arsenic

"From the governmental report, we see not only toxins but also heavy metals such as arsenic, mercury and others," Shen said.

Shen said that US-based Mars, which sells numerous pet food products including Pedigree, had failed to control the quality of its products manufactured in Thailand. Questionable Pedigree products processed from raw materials that were already moldy and unhealthy were sold in several Asian countries, including Cambodia, Vietnam, Singapore and Taiwan, causing kidney failure in dogs, he said.

In Taiwan, it is estimated that at least 100,000 dogs were affected. As of Tuesday, the council's records showed that the number of dog owners receiving compensation from Effem Foods Taiwan, which is Mars' local representative, was 5,760.

Lack of sympathy

Several dog owners who are refusing compensation from Effem said at the press conference that the lives of their lost pets, which they regarded as family members, can not be assigned a monetary value. They said that the lawsuit is meant to expose the pet food supplier's lack of sympathy.

"The representatives from Effem showed us no sympathy," he said. They even set an upper limit on the compensation and were reluctant to apologize for the incident," said Liou Yu-feng , who lost two dogs that ate Pedigree dry food.



Pet owners display their dogs, or pictures of their dead dogs, while discussing their lawsuit against Pedigree at a press conference yesterday in Taipei. PHOTO: CHIANG YING-YING, TAIPEI TIMES

Liou, a journalist working for the Liberty Times [the Taipei Times' sister newspaper], said that he and his wife had suffered from insomnia since their nine-year-old dog Du Du died in January.

Too much water

Liou said the council did not investigate the dog's death until March, delaying the delivery of warnings about the questionable pet food. Liou's other dog, Happy, a 12-year-old weighing 28kg and capable of jumping 2.2m in the air when healthy - died of kidney failure in April. Yang Ru-chien yesterday showed the media his 14kg pet dog, Hsiao Hay -- recovering from kidney failure -- saying that he had stopped feeding the dog Pedigree when it began drinking abnormal amounts of water. Hsiao Hay's health began to improve with treatment.

According to the dog owners' legal advisor, Paul Maas Risenhoover, victims from Asian countries plan to demand compensation of US\$20 billion. Risenhoover aims to demand at least US\$100,000 for each wrongful dog death.

Council officials said that the government would assist those seeking compensation by helping to secure their dogs' medical records.