

Packing plant linked to tainted beef ordered shut

September 28 2012, by Charmaine Noronha

(AP)—The Canadian Food Inspection Agency said Friday that it has temporarily shut a meatpacking plant linked to contaminated beef products that have been distributed across Canada and the United States.

Brian Evans, special advisor to the president of the inspection agency, said Friday that XL Foods has had its operating license temporarily suspended. The agency said an XL Foods plant in Brooks, Alberta won't resume operations until it has taken the steps necessary to ensure its products are free of E. coli bacteria.

Evans said all products currently at the plant are under the agency's detention and control and will be released only after being tested for E. coli.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture earlier this week extended its public health alert about the company's beef to stores in 30 states. A recall has also been issued in Puerto Rico.

Along with retail giant Walmart, the store chains involved in the XL Foods recall in the U.S. include Safeway, Kroger, Jay C, FoodsCo., Food4Less, Albertson's and Sam's Club.

The alert meant XL Foods would voluntarily recall beef products, which include steaks, roasts and ground beef, from these stores.

Across Canada, the recall includes 316 products.

American food inspectors first noted a problem during a border check on Sept. 3—one day before the Canadians—but issued the first public notice on Sept. 20.

Canada revoked the plant's permit to export beef to the U.S. on Sept. 13 at the request of the USDA.

E. coli bacteria can cause diarrhea, dehydration and other problems and is often worse in the very young and elderly. The bacteria is often present at slaughter plants, but can also be found in several other food sources, as well as equipment used to process food items.

Since Sept. 16, the CFIA has issued at least eight recall alerts for XL Foods ground beef products over E. coli concerns.

The agency said information provided by the company on Sept. 26 and gathered through inspector oversight showed the company, one of the country's largest meat packers, had not corrected deficiencies identified during a recent on-site review.

Calls to the company were not immediately returned.

Alberta Health Service officials are investigating nine illnesses tied to E. coli but have only yet definitely identified four patients in Edmonton who got sick after eating Kirkland brand strip loin steaks purchased at a Costco outlet in Edmonton.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency said the meat the steaks were made from came from the XL Foods plant, but health officials aren't sure if the E. coli was on the product or if it came from a metal meat tenderizing machine used at the Costco store.

The store has said it would no longer use the tenderizing machine.

XL Foods said in a statement earlier this week that none of its products have been tied directly to an illness.

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