

Fact or Fiction: Pentobarbital in Dog Food

Pentobarbital is a drug that is used to euthanize our pets after sharing a hopefully happy life together.

What is the real story about pentobarbital in dog food?

Are we living in a dog eat dog world?

Rumors exist that rendered by-products contain dead dogs and cats.

Where did this rumor come from?

Pentobarbital is a drug that is used to euthanize our pets after sharing a hopefully happy life together. As the dog food you are feeding probably contains meat like beef, duck, pork or fish you would not expect pentobarbital to be present in your doggie's dinner. However, pentobarbital continues to be found in pet food which leads to the hypothesis that our once beloved dogs and cats are in pet food. The pentobarbital-concern started off with anecdotal reports from veterinarians in the 1990s saying pentobarbital was losing its effectiveness as an anesthetizing agent in dogs.

The FDA 's explanation of residues of pentobarbital in dog food:

Source of these residues is euthanized, rendered cattle and horses. The amount of pentobarbital in dog food is very small and doesn't cause problems. Studies show that the drug metabolism is not altered at these levels and therefore the presence of pentobarbital in dog food is not an explanation for the apparent loss of effectiveness as an anesthetizing agent.

Regarding the first bullet: Horse DNA is not detected in pet food (as said by the American Journal of Veterinary Research). Also, cattle are only occasionally euthanized with pentobarbital.

Regarding the second bullet: Pentobarbital is not approved for use in pet food so it should not be present at all. In addition, some veterinarians disagree with the statement that a small amount of pentobarbital is harmless. They say traces of pentobarbital can speed up progression of chronic degenerative diseases.

Thus far conclusive evidence of euthanized cats and dogs being used as dog food is lacking.

One study (conducted by the FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine) used a very sensitive PCR-based test capable of detecting canine and feline DNA at a level of 0.0007% (w/w). None of the pentobarbital-positive dog food samples was tested positive. Having found only one study so far, the conclusion for now is as follows: IF there is dog meat present in commercial dog food, then

the level is less than 7 lb. per 500 tons. Those levels cannot explain the detected pentobarbital and so the source of this drug remains a mystery to be elucidated.

But can DNA survive the rendering process? For detection using PCR methods only a very small amount of DNA is required. I haven't seen the actual data of the study but the controls would have to be positive of course to be certain that IF dog meat is present it can be detected using this method.

Pentobarbital in Dog Food and Other Shocking Facts About Pet Food

A woman who has dug deep into this and wrote numerous letters to the pet food authorities is Ann Martin. She has bundled her research results into her books "Food Pets Die For. Shocking Facts About Pet Food" and "Protect Your Pet: More Shocking Facts". She strongly believes the rumors are true and she will tell you briefly about some of her findings in this video:

She starts the interview by telling that she observes a higher incidence of cancer, auto-immune diseases and liver and kidney diseases in dogs and cats. Whether this is true or not I don't know. But I have heard that our pets live up to older ages than before. And with old age come several age-related diseases amongst which cancer. Access to data presenting dog breed, together with age and disease history in time should be able to provide clear answers on this.

For more of her findings about pentobarbital dog food you should read her book. So far the industry replies by denying the accusations. Rendering plants respond that they have different categories for pet foods and waste. Until the last stone is turned... we cannot know the truth for certain.

Reading Ann Martin's book you can only hope that what she is concluding is far from the truth. But has the world ever been black and white? Can it all be faulty? Ann Martin has done her homework! In case you cannot get the rather worrying mental images out of your mind after reading the first chapters, it's good to know the book second part is about home cooked meals and recipes, natural dog food companies, vitamins, minerals and supplements.

When you're worried the dog food company you're purchasing from is involved in these kind of practices then just ask them. Write them a letter or an e-mail and ask about the sources of the meat they are using. Which rendering plant or slaughterhouse are they using? Do they test whether the meat and bone meal they are using is free of companion animals, drugs, pathogens, heavy metals and pesticides? Ask them anything you like and if you do not get a satisfactory answer, considering changing dog food.