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Maine Probes Hannaford's Delay in Reporting Pizza Dough Tampering

By Bridget Goldschmidt (/author-profile/bgoldschmidt) - 10/22/2020

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 Maine Probes Hannaford's Delay in Reporting Pizza Dough Tampering It'll Be Pizza Portland Pie Co.

Hannaford is under investigation by Maine's agriculture department for failing to report August tampering incidents involving Portland Pie Co. pizza dough until October, a delay that the grocery has attributed to an email failure.

Maine's agriculture department is looking into why Hannaford Supermarkets delayed for two months before reporting instances of razor blades and small metal shards discovered in Portland Pie Co. fresh pizza dough sold at its Sanford, Maine, store in August, in an apparent violation of the section of the Maine Food Code that requires licensed grocers to report imminent health hazards.

According to the Portland, Maine *Press Herald*, the state Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) (<https://www.maine.gov/dacf/>) only found out about the August incidents after more blades and metal shards were discovered in dough sold at a Saco, Maine, Hannaford in October and the police had already been notified.

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☰ The first call should have been to us,” Celeste Poulin, the department’s director of quality assurance and regulations, told the *Press Herald* (<https://www.pressherald.com/2020/10/21/state-looks-into-grocers-delay-in-reporting-suspected-food-tampering/>). “We should have been notified pretty much immediately, but we were not. It’s something I am going to be addressing with Hannaford’s management. We are investigating the circumstances as we speak ... We don’t get a lot of these kind of cases, I get it, but when you do, we’ve got to be your first or second call.”

Hannaford has attributed the notification delay on an email failure, explaining the Sanford store reported the incident but its email system prevented the report from being referred up the corporate chain of command. In apologizing for the error, the grocer said that it has rectified the email issue and added additional reporting requirements. Beyond that, Hannaford has declined to comment on the matter, referring all inquiries to the police departments investigating the crime.

Nicholas Mitchell, 38, a former forklift driver at It’ll Be Pizza (<https://www.itllbepizza.com/>), the Scarborough, Maine-based manufacturer of the dough, was arrested in connection with the October tampering incident, and is now being held without bail in the county jail in York, Maine. Mitchell had allegedly been harassing the company ever since his dismissal, and It’ll Be Pizza noted that it would have brought Mitchell to the attention of authorities earlier if it had known about the August incidents.

No injuries have been reported as a result of the tampering, which led to a recall of all Portland Pie Co. products (<https://progressivegrocer.com/hannaford-recalls-pizza-products-tampering-claims>) sold at Hannaford between August and Oct. 11, and caused the grocer to stop carrying the brand’s products at all of its stores indefinitely.

“We don’t want consumers to have to ask is this food safe,” Hilary Thesmar, SVP of food safety for Arlington, Virginia-based FMI-The Food Industry Association (<https://www.fmi.org/>), told the newspaper. “The goal of the entire industry, from producer to retailer to regulator, is to have programs in place to prevent harm, and if something does go wrong, have a program in place to act quickly. Because if something harms the industry, leads to a lack of confidence, it hurts everybody.”

U.S. Food and Drug Administration inspectors were in Saco this week to meet with local police to discuss the tampering incidents, the *Press Herald* reported, adding that the FDA had declined to speak on the matter, citing a policy of not commenting on open investigations.

Additionally, “DACF will be investigating the intentional adulteration incidents at Hannaford,” Poulin told the *Press Herald*. “The Maine Food Code does allow for enforcement where a licensee fails to report circumstances that may endanger public health to the department. Based on the information gathered, the department will weigh the appropriate next steps.”

According to Poulin, the agency expects that it will at least require Hannaford to internal food tampering controls that would have to be reviewed and approved by the department, and that must include regular training provided to all applicable Hannaford staffers.

Scarborough, Maine-based Hannaford (<https://www.hannaford.com/>) operates 184 stores in five Northeast states, employing more than 26,000 associates. Parent company Ahold Delhaize USA (<https://www.aholddelhaize.com/en/brands/united-states/our-brands-in-the-united-states/>), a division of Zaandam, Netherlands-based Ahold Delhaize (<https://www.aholddelhaize.com/en/media/>), is No. 11 on The *PG* 100, *Progressive Grocer’s* 2020 list of the top food and consumables retailers in North America (<https://progressivegrocer.com/pg-100-walmart-amazon-kroger-dominate-top-retailers-food-and-consumables>).

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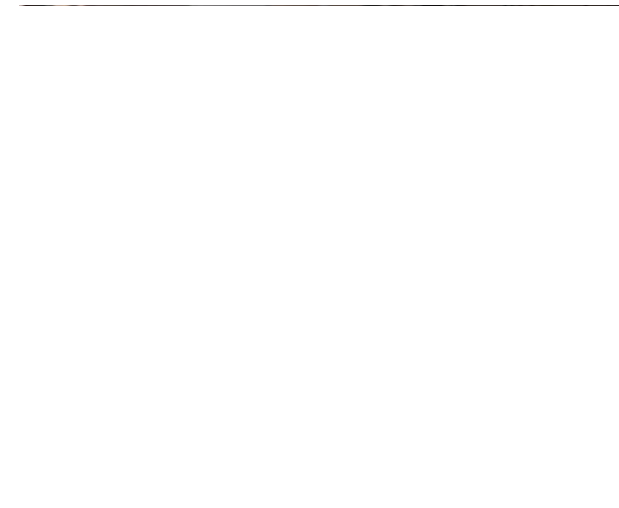
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