

# Supermarket chain says razor was detected in pizza dough product in Maine in August; blames computer glitch for reporting delay

By [Travis Andersen](#) Globe Staff, Updated October 14, 2020, 1:50 p.m.



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The Hannaford supermarket chain said Wednesday that metal was detected in some of its pizza dough products as early as August, when a computer glitch prevented the company from initially responding to the issue “beyond store level.”

Hannaford — which has store locations in Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire

Hannaford — which has store locations in Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York — provided an update Wednesday in a statement, one day after New Hampshire resident Nicholas R. Mitchell, 38, made his first court appearance on charges alleging he put razor blades in Portland Pie pizza dough packages that ended up on a Hannaford shelf in Saco, Maine.

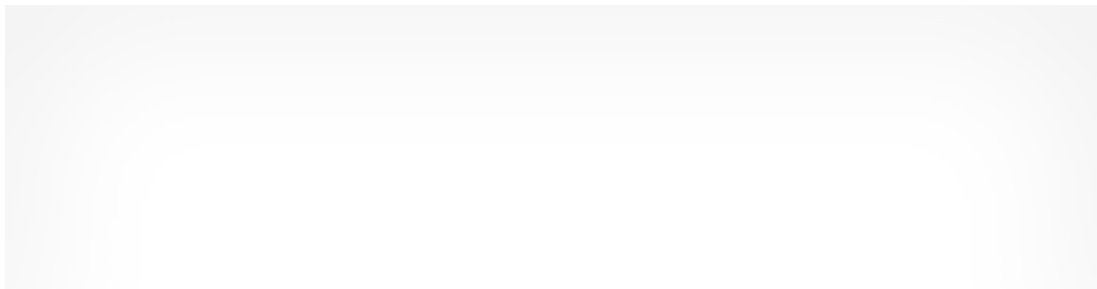
“We are working closely with investigative authorities around the incidents involving malicious tampering of Portland Pie branded items,” the statement said. “We took comprehensive action to mitigate any potential harm to the public, broadening our recall well beyond the stores in scope of the tampering. We expanded the recall to all stores out of an abundance of caution.”

As part of the recall process, Hannaford continued, “we learned about a notification error in our reporting system – a failure within our email system that prevented reports made in August of metal in Portland Pie products from being elevated appropriately within our company beyond store level. This technological error does not meet our high standards, and we apologize that it occurred. We have addressed the IT issue and are adding additional reporting processes to ensure this situation never happens again.”

An August case of alleged tampering was reported Oct. 11 to Sanford, Maine, police by a Hannaford risk management official, said Sanford police Chief Thomas P. Connolly Jr. via e-mail Tuesday evening.

Hannaford, regarding the Sanford matter, said that as part of the tampering probe, “Hannaford’s Food Safety team learned that a similar object had also been found in pizza dough in Sanford in August. This incident was reported correctly at store level but not appropriately elevated within Hannaford” due to the e-mail system failure.

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Connolly wrote that “two customers who purchased Portland Pie pizza dough from the Sanford Hannaford’s stated that they found razor blades or parts of a razor blade in the dough.”

One customer returned three bags of dough, at least one of which contained a razor blade, Connolly said. He wrote that a second customer found “a fragment of a razor blade inside her dough; she provided that fragment to Hannaford.”

“According to the Hannaford risk management person, the incidents were labeled at that time as a ‘product issue,’ ” Connolly wrote. “The store marked the items with the customers’ names, and then secured the items in a freezer until Hannaford’s ‘product team division...could look into the situation.’ The bags of dough remained in the freezer until 10-11-20 and were collected by a Sanford Officer and placed into the evidence room.”

Connolly said the dough may be taken to a forensic lab for further analysis.

“The Sanford Police Department’s Criminal Investigations Division will coordinate with the Saco Police Department and the York County District Attorney’s Office to determine what further actions may be taken,” Connolly wrote. “This case remains under active investigation. There is no further information at this time.”

Mitchell [appeared during a brief remote hearing Tuesday](#) morning in the Seventh Circuit, District Division Court, in Dover, N.H., where he agreed not to challenge his transfer back to Maine to face the charges related to the Saco tampering, the only alleged tampering he’s currently charged with

tampering he's currently charged with.

Officials said Maine authorities will likely pick Mitchell up by the end of the week, but just in case, a status conference in the Dover courtroom was tentatively scheduled for Oct. 27.

Saco authorities said the disturbing case came to light Oct. 6, when a customer at a Hannaford Supermarket there notified local police of possible tampering with food items at the store. The customer, whom police didn't name, had purchased "Portland Pie Pizza dough and located razor blades inside the dough," police said in a statement.

A review of store surveillance footage revealed that "a person tampered with the packaging of several Portland Pie Pizza doughs," police said.

Authorities identified Mitchell as the suspect. "Nicholas Mitchell is a former associate of 'It'll be Pizza company' who manufactures product for Portland Pie," the police statement said.

"This case remains under investigation," police said. "If you have purchased Portland Pie Pizza dough and have found razor blades inside the dough, call the Saco Police Department's Detective Division at 207-282-8216."

Portland Pie also commented on the case in a recent statement, which didn't mention Mitchell by name but said he'd been wanted "in connection with a number of food tampering incidents at Hannaford Supermarkets involving Portland Pie Company branded food items, one of several retail and wholesale brands manufactured by It'll Be Pizza, a frozen pizza dough manufacturer in Scarborough, ME."

According to Portland Pie, It'll Be Pizza "sells dough balls under the Portland Pie Company brand in retail locations throughout the Northeast. This incident has no direct connection to Portland Pie Company restaurants or to any of our menu items. The suspect was an ex-employee of It'll Be Pizza."

It'll Be Pizza, Portland Pie continued, "has been working closely with law enforcement and its retail supermarket partners. On October 11, Hannaford Supermarkets issued a recall of all Portland Pie Company branded products sold in their stores from August 1, 2020 through October 11, 2020."

Mike White, It'll Be Pizza CEO, issued a separate statement Oct. 12 that said his outfit "has been working closely with law enforcement and our retail supermarket partners. On October 11, Hannaford Supermarkets issued a recall of all Portland Pie Co. branded products sold in their stores from August 1, 2020 through October 11, 2020, and we have reached out to our other retail distributors to do the same."

Since the criminal investigation remains active, White said, "we cannot make further comment at this time. We remain committed to our customers, our distribution partners, and to the continued excellence and safety of our products."

Hannaford on Sunday issued a recall for all Portland Pie dough and cheese products sold between Aug. 1 and Oct. 11 at its 184 stores in New York, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine.

Two more regional grocery chains, Shaw's and Star Market, have stopped selling the pizza dough.

"At Shaw's and Star Market, we take the quality and safety of products very seriously," their parent company said in a statement. "Our stores are removing from sale Portland Pie Co. pizza dough. Customers who purchased any of these items may return them to any Shaw's or Star Market store for a full refund."

Mitchell's had prior contact with law enforcement in Maine.

In 2018 he received a two-year jail sentence in that state, with all but seven days suspended, for criminal threatening with a dangerous weapon, according to [the Maine Department of Corrections online database](#).

Mitchell was also placed on two years probation in that case, with provisions requiring

him to seek counseling for anger management and substance abuse, the database says.

In the current pizza prosecution, court records in New Hampshire state that Mitchell is charged in Maine with reckless conduct, criminal threatening with a dangerous weapon, violating conditions of release, and probation revocation.

He was arrested in Dover on Sunday, records show.

*Material from the Associated Press was used in this report.*

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