What's in the Bowl? New Study Finds PFAS in Commercial Pet Food

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While there is a newfound awareness of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substance (PFAS) exposure and its consequences in humans, a new study found that through pet food, dogs and cats may also be exposed to PFAS. A study was conducted on 100 different commercially available wet and dry pet food products in Japan to determine the presence and quantity of 34 PFAS variants. Ultimately, 52 of the studied cat food products and 48 dog food products contained PFAS.

In humans, “probable links” are reported between exposure to PFAS and several health effects, including damage to the liver and immune system, reproductive issues, and an increased risk of cancer. Full data about the effects of PFAS on pets is not yet available. However, studies suggest that certain PFAS chemicals can cause liver, thyroid, kidney, and respiratory diseases in cats.

The findings showed that several products contained amounts of PFAS that could be considered moderate to high. Levels varied by food type, ingredients, and country of origin. Further, dry food was found to have a higher PFAS concentration while wet food PFAS exposure was estimated to be higher due to higher rates of consumption. Fish-based cat foods from Asia, the United States, and Europe contained the highest PFAS values. Wet fish-based food from Thailand contained especially high PFAS amounts. The study found that the levels detected generally exceeded the daily intake limits set by the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) for humans. Because these levels were set for humans and not pets, the findings are simply a preliminary assessment.

Specifically, fish-based products were found to contain higher levels of perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS), perfluoroundecanoic acid (PFUnDA), and perfluorotridecanoic acid (PFTrDA). Fish are more likely to contain PFAS due to the concentration and movement of synthetic chemicals in the ocean. The regional differences of PFAS levels may be explained by geographical differences in the usage of PFAS production, both historically and contemporaneously. As such, researchers believe fish-based pet products could significantly expose pets to PFAS (especially cats, considering fish is a popular ingredient in cat food).

In addition to reporting their findings, the authors of this study highlight the need for regulatory oversight and toxicological evaluations of pets and potential PFAS exposure. Due to the nature of the pet food market, continual monitoring and tracking of PFAS regulations and guidelines worldwide is imperative for staying ahead of the compliance curve, maintaining credibility, and protecting brand reputation.

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