PROPYLENE GLYCOL AND CATS

Propylene glycol is used as a moistening agent in many animal food applications, but not in cat food. Although propylene glycol is not used in cat food, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) still considers it “generally recognized as safe” (GRAS) for use in human food and all animal foods other than for cats.¹

Most cat food producers stopped using propylene glycol in 1992 when data indicated a unique sensitivity of cats to propylene glycol. Specifically, studies found that large doses of propylene glycol when fed to cats can produce an abnormality known as “Heinz body” in the cats’ red blood cells. Although Heinz bodies only appear to shorten the lives of feline red blood cells, FDA expressed concern that the bodies could cause anemia in cats.²

In a final rule in 1996, FDA declared propylene glycol in or on cat food not generally recognized as safe.

Available data indicate that only cats appear to be sensitive to Heinz body formation from propylene glycol exposure. Heinz body formation from propylene glycol has not been observed in dogs, cattle, or humans. While changing regulations to end the cat food use of propylene glycol, FDA noted that the compound continues to be GRAS when used in accordance with good manufacturing or feeding practice for all species other than cats.³

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¹ 21 C.F.R. §§ 184.1666 and 582.1666(b).