

Retailers angry they're on tainted meat list

BY LINDA JOHNSON
Staff Writer

York Region meat store owners say they've been wrongly branded sellers of tainted meat after their names appeared on a list of customers of a meat packing company whose products have been called a potential public health hazard.

Aylmer Meat Packers Inc. was closed down Monday by the province after inspectors said the company failed to follow adequate inspection procedures. It advised consumers to avoid all beef and beef products from the plant.

While officials have not formally announced the problem with the meat, they are investigating the possibility the company was processing livestock which died before slaughter.

But of the four area meat companies on the list of Aylmer's customers, three said they had not bought any products from Aylmer in some time.

Tom Carvelli, manager of P&F Meat Products in Markham, said the company has not bought any meat from Aylmer since April 25. He was shocked to see his company on the list.

"I'm really worried. It's not as if I've done anything wrong, but I'm suffering already because of the allegations against another plant," he said, noting he had only three customers by about 3:30 p.m. Tuesday.

Usually, he has about 30 to 40 customers by that time on a weekday, he said.

Mr. Carvelli said he doesn't understand why no one contacted stores first to check if they bought meat from the plant before publishing their names.

He also criticized the government for not providing more specific information as is usually done, indicating

the type of products and dates of purchase.

It makes no sense, he said, to advise consumers to ask whether the stores have sold the affected product when they don't know what product is under suspicion.

He said he received about 100 calls from customers Tuesday, asking about product they bought in the past.

"I don't even have answers for them. All I know is, it's not from there. But I can't educate them any further so they don't have to worry about it."

"What are they recalling? I have no idea," he said. "All I know is my name is on that list. It's on the website. It's on 680 News, on 640. It's on the fourth page of The Sun today, listed as one of the stores carrying the beef products. And I'm not even carrying them."

Steve Szukics, who manages Balaton Wholesale Meat Products in Concord, said it, too, should not have been on the list.

"The sad thing about it is we haven't purchased any beef from them in the last three months."

There are so many people on the list. Everyone gets on the list and there are customers who haven't even bought (from Aylmer's) in a year," he said.

An employee of another Markham store, Richmond Hill Wholesale Meats, said firmly it, too, had not recently bought any meat from Aylmer.

The owner of the only area store that bought food from Aylmer's was more critical of the inspection system, which, he said, was failing both consumers and retailers.

Alex Di Lucia, of Alex Quality Meats in Markham, wondered why the plant was allowed to continue operating after it received several warnings and is currently facing charges.

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