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## **Chinese Baby Formula Scandal Widens as 2nd Death Is Announced**

By JIM YARDLEY

BEIJING — China's Ministry of Health announced on Monday that a second baby had died in recent months and that 1,253 others had been sickened by contaminated milk powder in a widening food safety scandal that has exposed persistent weaknesses in the country's regulatory system.

More than 340 infants remain hospitalized, including 53 in serious condition. Inspection teams are visiting dairy farms and processing centers in the country's four main milk-producing provinces to ensure that producers are not violating safety standards.

The Chinese authorities have confirmed that the tainted baby formula was laced with melamine, a chemical additive sometimes used to make plastics and fertilizer. Last year, after thousands of pets became ill in the United States, the same chemical was found in pet food and traced to a Chinese ingredient.

The tainted milk powder has been traced to the Sanlu Group, one of China's biggest dairy producers, which operates as a joint venture with a New Zealand-based dairy conglomerate, Fonterra. China does not export milk powder to the United States.

Last week, Sanlu ordered a belated recall of its milk powder even though Chinese state media have reported that some parents had been complaining of problems since March. More than 10,000 tons of milk powder have been seized or recalled, according to the Health Ministry, and the authorities have ordered the company to halt production.

Sickened infants have suffered from kidney stones, and investigators are trying to determine how the formula became contaminated and whether Sanlu concealed the problem before announcing the recall.

The tainted milk has renewed concerns about China's system of food safety regulation, even as Communist Party leaders have pledged to improve oversight, with the country now a major food exporter.

Chinese regulators have repeatedly failed to detect food safety problems in a timely manner. Moreover, despite ample evidence that secrecy tends to compound safety problems, companies and local officials still appear determined to minimize or cover up problems in the food supply rather than alert the public.

Four years ago, at least 13 Chinese babies died of malnutrition after their parents unwittingly fed them fake baby formula that lacked any nutritional value.

Officials say they are questioning nearly 80 people suspected of involvement in the latest scandal. On Monday, the police arrested two brothers who ran a milk collection center in Hebei Province suspected of adding melamine to diluted milk, according to the official news agency Xinhua. Adding the chemical makes the material test at higher concentrations of protein.

Fonterra, the New Zealand conglomerate that owns a 43 percent share in Sanlu, said it first learned last month that the Chinese company was selling contaminated powder. On Monday, New Zealand officials blamed local Chinese officials for failing to take action until the New Zealand government contacted the central authorities in Beijing.

The prime minister of New Zealand, Helen Clark, said Fonterra officials had been “trying for weeks to get official recall, and the local authorities in China would not do it.”

“I think the first inclination was to try and put a towel over it and deal with it without an official recall,” she said, according to Television New Zealand, a government network.

Chinese health officials said physicians had examined 10,000 infants who had been fed the Sanlu formula and found that 1,253 had been sickened. Ma Shaowei, a vice health minister, said many of the ailing children were from poorer areas, according to a transcript on the Internet. But at least three babies were hospitalized as far away as Hainan, the island province not far from Vietnam.

It seems likely that contaminated formula had been distributed for several months.

The two deaths attributed to the bad formula, both in Gansu, occurred long before the scandal became public. One was a 5-month-old boy who died on May 1; the other was an 8-month-old girl who died on July 22, according to the Health Ministry.

Last year, the pet food scandal touched off a trade dispute between the United States and China.

Chinese regulators responded last year with a high-profile crackdown and banned such uses of melamine. Regulators expressed outrage about the latest problems, but did not clarify why it took so long to uncover.

Li Changjiang, minister of the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine, visited Sanlu’s hometown in Hebei Province and was shown bags of the tainted milk powder seized by the police. “It’s shocking,” Mr. Li said, according to China Daily. “It’s a crime against the people.”

Mr. Li said that the result of the investigation would be announced this week but suggested that the problem occurred at milk processing centers rather than on farms. The centers collect milk from farmers and then pool it for sale to larger dairy concerns.

“It’s unlikely that dairy farmers mixed the industrial chemical melamine in fresh milk,” Mr. Li said, according to China Daily. “We believe the contamination is more likely to have occurred at milk collecting stations.”

China’s state media reported the formula scandal on Wednesday. The next day, the Sanlu Group recalled all formula that the company had produced before Aug. 6.

But state media have also reported that parents began complaining about the formula in March — and that Sanlu did not order a recall.

The Sanlu Group could not be reached for comment on Monday morning. But a Sanlu vice president, Zhang Zhenling, read a formal apology during a news briefing on Monday in the city of Shijiazhuang, where the corporation is based.

“The serious safety accident of the Sanlu formula milk powder for infants has caused severe harm to many

sickened babies and their families," Mr. Zhang said, according to Xinhua. "Sanlu Group expresses its most sincere apology to you."

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