

Grocery Freezers Empty as Blue Bell Conducts Massive Ice Cream Recall

Article By:

Product Liability and Mass Torts

Last night, Texas-based Blue Bell Creamery announced a full, nationwide [recall](#) of all its products. This is a significant expansion of the recall Blue Bell began earlier this month after three deaths in Kansas from listeria – the first recall in the company’s 108-year history. The initial recall was limited to specific products, but was expanded to all products after two samples of cookie dough ice cream tested positive for listeria. [The CDC](#) traced the Kansas cases of listeria to Blue Bell plants in Texas and Oklahoma, but it is still not clear how the contamination began.

Listeria monocytogenes can cause severe, sometimes fatal illness in children, elderly people, and people with weakened immune systems. Symptoms include high fever, nausea, abdominal pain, and stiffness. Currently, ten reported listeria cases are linked to Blue Bell. Five people have been diagnosed in Kansas, one in Oklahoma, three in Texas, and today, the [CDC announced](#) an Arizona case.

Along with the recall, Blue Bell announced several ways it would improve safety. First, Blue Bell implemented a “test and hold” system where it will test each product and hold it until it is shown to be safe. Additionally, Blue Bell is keeping its Oklahoma facility closed while it investigates. Finally, Blue Bell announced it will expand its daily cleaning and sanitizing system, expand swabbing and testing by 800 percent to include more surfaces, provide additional employee training, and send daily samples for offsite microbiology testing.

Product recalls are a sensitive chapter and a reputational crossroads in any company’s history, and must be handled appropriately and effectively.

Blue Bell, which touts itself as “the best ice cream in the country,” is a longstanding, much-loved brand, especially in Texas and throughout the South. It has the advantage of a deep reservoir of customer goodwill to draw upon. Many consumers who commented on social media about the recall expressed sympathy for Blue Bell and its employees, approval of Blue Bell’s conduct in announcing the recall, and their eagerness to see Blue Bell back on the shelves. This is consistent with [studies](#) showing that consumer attitudes are more positive toward companies that take an

assertive, “strong” approach toward recalls, especially those engaging in voluntary recall action, that brand familiarity can diminish the negative impacts of a recall, and that a well-managed recall response can in fact have a [positive effect](#) on consumers’ relationship with the brand.

This outbreak follows a spate of listeria reports associated with [caramel apples](#) in January. Several companies issued recalls after listeria infected 35 people in 12 states and resulted in seven deaths. In the wake of those recalls, President Obama, Senator Durbin, and Representative DeLauro called for a single food safety agency to curb these types of contamination outbreaks, arguing a single agency would act more quickly and provide more effective oversight.

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