

# Apologies over Horsemeat in Edinburgh school meals

The private contractor responsible for providing school meals to a number of the City's primary schools where mince containing 1%-5% horsemeat may have been served to children has apologised to the City of Edinburgh Council and parents for 'an unfortunate and unacceptable lack of communication'.

Last week, the Council obtained the results of its own tests on a batch of frozen mince taken in late February from the shared kitchen of Pirniehall and St David's Primary Schools. A letter was then sent to parents at the affected schools as swiftly as was practicable, advising them of the test results and reassuring them that there was no risk to their children's health.

Amey Built Environment (Amey) has since responded to a request by The City of Edinburgh Council to explain why they failed to notify the Council of the presence of horsemeat in beef mince which they had used in school meals in six school kitchens on 8 March, when they themselves were first alerted to the fact by their supplier, 3663.

The company has also provided a list of meals containing beef mince which were on the menu at each school in the five-week period between w/c 3 February 2013 and w/c 4 March 2013 and which may have contained mince from the affected batch which was later recalled by 3663.

During this period, one week was a holiday. This information, together with a statement of explanation and apology from Amey, has been included in a letter which was sent to parents in the six affected schools on 4 April.



Convener of

Education – Paul  
Godzik

Councillor Paul Godzik, Education Convener, said: “As soon as we became aware through our own tests that mince containing a small percentage of horsemeat had been supplied to a number of our schools, we immediately took action by contacting parents to let them know. We also checked each of the school kitchens to make sure there was no mince from this batch remaining.

“It was only after we raised the issue with Amey that they advised us that this same batch had in fact been recalled by 3663 on 8 March.

“It is unacceptable that the Council was not given this information immediately – had we known on 8 March, we could and would have alerted parents to this at that time.

“We are pleased that Amey have now apologised for this lack of communication and are grateful to them for their cooperation in this matter.

“Parents are quite right to expect the highest possible standards from the food their children are served at school and the Council prides itself on providing meals which are nutritious, satisfying and value-for-money\*\*. It is absolutely crucial therefore that any problems with the produce supplied to our school kitchens are flagged up to us immediately so that we can take appropriate action.”

Gillian Duggan, Managing Director of Amey Built Environment, said: -“Recently we have commenced an investigation into how contaminated meat made its way into our supply chain at a date between February 2013 and 8 March 2013. Tests have revealed that a small amount of contaminated meat containing up to 5% horse DNA was served to six schools in Edinburgh before a product recall notice was issued by the meat supplier on 8 March 2013.

“Although checks confirmed no current stock of the contaminated meat in any of the premises, there has been an unfortunate and unacceptable lack of communication from Amey to the City of Edinburgh Council regarding this issue. This resulted in a delay in the Council being able to notify parents.

“We at Amey are very sorry this issue has occurred, and for any distress caused to parents, who quite rightly expect high standards.”

Ms Duggan added that Amey would be making a donation to the Scottish NSPCC on behalf of the impacted schools.

She also said that the company would be undertaking a review of its supply chain and an enhancement of their communication and escalation procedures.

Green councillor Chas Booth said:-“It does appear that the main delay in informing parents was a result of Amey failing to tell the council that mince delivered to a city school contained horsemeat. But that’s what you get if you get locked into a food system that puts volume and profit way above quality and trust.

“There are also still questions as to why the Council’s own testing took a full month before results were available. Surely that can be speeded up.

“This sorry saga may be closed now but I really hope we can learn the lessons. The first step is to carry out a fundamental review of school meals and other catering, with a focus on fresh, local and organic food we can trust.”