

# Fast Food Foibles

By Reg P. Wydeven  
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A few weeks ago, I wrote about a new law that requires food manufacturers to clearly label their products if they contain ingredients with proteins derived from the eight major allergenic foods - milk, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, wheat, soybeans, tree nuts and peanuts. In response to this law, McDonald's quietly updated its website to indicate that their french fries contain wheat and milk ingredients.

As I mentioned, my son is extremely allergic to peanuts, eggs and milk. Once we knew McDonald's fries weren't cooked in peanut oil, we let him eat them not knowing they also contained milk. We're grateful he hasn't had an allergic reaction to them, but from now on we're getting him the apple slices.

Mark and Theresa Chimiak's 5-year-old daughter wasn't as lucky. She has an intolerance to gluten, a wheat protein, and became seriously ill after eating McDonald's fries. The Chimiaks have sued McDonald's for failing to disclose their fries contained wheat.

Nadia Sugich, a vegan, also sued McDonald's for failing to disclose their fries contained dairy ingredients, as she eats no animal products. These lawsuits are nothing new for the fast food giant. McDonald's settled a lawsuit in 2002 by paying \$10 million to a vegetarian group that sued after discovering their fries were cooked in beef-flavored oil. The group sued because McDonald's insisted in 1990 that it was abandoned beef tallow for pure vegetable oil.

Last February, McDonald's paid \$8.5 million to settle a suit by a nonprofit advocacy group accusing the company of misleading consumers by announcing plans in September 2002 to change its cooking oil. Still not wanting to change the flavor of its best-selling product, McDonald's has yet to make the switch.

If that's not bad enough, McDonald's is also being sued by Lora Davis for \$10,000 because she found blood smeared inside her bag of french fries. The blood came from an employee that suffered a cut, and the employee was then fired. Davis went to her doctor to be tested for infectious diseases, which all came back negative. Davis filed suit, however, after McDonald's refused to pay her medical bills.

Adding insult to injury, Ronald MacDonald was charged with robbing the Wendy's restaurant where he worked in Manchester, New Hampshire. While no relation to the McDonald's restaurant mascot, this clown was caught by his manager stealing money from the safe at about 1:30 a.m.

The last thing Wendy's needed was more bad publicity in light of last year's huge chili scandal. Anna Ayala and Jaime Plascencia, the couple that was 'fingered' in the incident, were sentenced to prison terms of at least nine years for conspiracy to file a false insurance claim and attempted grand theft with damages exceeding \$2.5 million.

Plascencia paid a co-worker \$100 for a finger he lost in a workplace accident. He then gave the digit to Ayala who planted it in her chili from a Wendy's in San Jose and claimed she bit into it. Ayala then sued Wendy's for damages. Because they weren't all thumbs, the police were able to knuckle down and gather evidence that 'pointed' to a hoax, but by then the damage was done. Wendy's claimed it lost \$2.5 million in sales because of the well publicized scam, and was forced to lay off dozens of workers in San Jose-area franchises.

From now on, I don't think I'll eat out quite as much.

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