

BUSINESS

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RECALL

Tainted Meat In Region

Ground Beef Distributed In Northeast

By **BEN DOBBIN**
Associated Press

Contaminated fresh ground beef caused a possible E. coli outbreak that killed two people and sent 16 others to hospitals, federal health officials said Monday.

Twenty-eight people may have become ill after eating beef produced by Fairbank Farms of Ashville, N.Y., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported. All but three of the suspected infections are in the northeastern U.S. and 18 are in New England, said CDC spokeswoman Lola Scott Russell.

The CDC did not specify the states where people were hospitalized, although the product has been linked to illnesses in Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

"The products have been cleared from store shelves," said Jerry Farrell Jr., commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection, "but families who have frozen ground beef over the past few weeks in Connecticut from Trader Joe's, Shaw's, BJ's Warehouse or Price Chopper should look on the package for the code that would indicate if it's part of the recalled batch."

Fairbank Farms recalled almost 546,000 pounds of fresh ground beef that had been distributed in September to stores from North Carolina to Maine. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's recall notice, dated Saturday, said the possibly tainted meat had been sold in numerous ways, from meatloaf and meatball mix to hamburger patties.

One of the deaths was an adult from Albany County, N.Y., who had several underlying health conditions, according to the state Health Department. The other fatality was previously reported by New Hampshire, where health officials said a patient died of complications.

Kidney failure is found in the most severe cases of E. coli. In less serious cases, the potentially deadly bacterium can cause bloody diarrhea and dehydration.

Some of the ground beef was sold in packages that carried the number "EST. 492" on the label. Those products were packaged Sept. 15-16 and may have been labeled with a sell-by date from Sept. 19 through Sept. 28, meaning they're no longer being sold as fresh product in supermarkets, Fairbank Farms said.

The USDA was urging customers with concerns to contact the stores where they bought the meat.

Ron Allen, Fairbank's CEO, urged consumers to check their freezers for the recalled ground beef.

Companies subject to such recalls are allowed to cook tainted meat to kill the bacteria and then use it in other products, a common practice in the food industry.

That won't happen in this case, the company said.

"At the end of the day, this product . . . is going in the garbage," said company spokeswoman Agi Schafer.

Symptoms of E. coli infections usually show up three to four days after a person eats contaminated food, although in some cases it can be as long as eight days. Officials said anyone having symptoms should immediately contact a doctor.

CONNECTICUT PROPERTY LINE

PULLING UP ROOTS

Coburn & Meredith Leaves Hartford For Simsbury, Glastonbury Sites

By **TERESA M. PELHAM**
Special to The Courant

After keeping shop at seven different locations in downtown Hartford over a span of 75 years, investment firm Coburn & Meredith is moving out of the city and into the suburbs, where the parking is free but walking-distance lunch spots are much more limited.

For CEO Barry Coburn, who joined the family-run firm in 1959 and is the son of one of the firm's founders, it's a bittersweet move.

"I remember as a child, sitting in the lap of the telephone operator, pulling all of her cords out," he said. "There was a time when you would walk down the street at lunchtime and see at least three or four people you knew. We loved being downtown."

But nostalgia couldn't win out over modern leasing realities for the firm.

Ten of Coburn & Meredith's employees are now working in an 1800s Victorian house in Simsbury, while another nine — the bulk of the firm's sales force — last week finished moving from space in Goodwin Square to rented space in Glastonbury.

"Our monthly mortgage payment to own the house is less than half of what we were paying

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per month, and rent for space in a Glastonbury office park is \$4,000 per month. The Goodwin Square lease is up at the end of the year and both suburban offices are now up and running during the transition.

"It was sad to leave Hartford," said Daly, who can now ride his bicycle to work in Simsbury. "For 75 years we'd never left Hartford, so leaving now is a huge deal. But the economics of it was glaring."

The firm began its history in Hartford on Lewis Street in 1934 as Coburn & Libby, but the firm's name changed to Coburn & Meredith after a merger in the 1970s.

In addition to lower monthly rent payments, the firm is now able to offer free parking to clients and employees. Street visibility was another plus of the suburban move. The firm

in downtown Hartford," said Rob Daly, managing director. In Hartford, the firm pays \$12,000 per month for 4,000 square feet of office space on the 15th floor of Goodwin Square on Asylum Street.

The mortgage payment for the 5,000-square-foot house on Route 167 is \$6,000

looked at several lease options in Hartford before ultimately deciding on the move earlier this year.

"We validated parking for clients parking in the Goodwin garage, but it was not at a discount for us," Daly said. "Getting out of the city will give our clients much easier access."

Parking tends to be the main reason companies leave cities in general, said Jay Wamester, principal at commercial real estate firm Colliers Dow & Condon.

"The differential between rents for Class A space in Hartford and Class A space in the suburbs is not that great," he said. "Parking in the central business district is really the biggest cost difference. Companies may see the value of having restaurants and cultural organizations close by, but when their lease is up and they put pen to paper, parking in a city becomes a huge consideration."

Wamester said he hasn't seen an abundance of businesses leaving Hartford for suburban areas, but he did note law firm Cantor Colburn's move last year from suburban Bloomfield to two floors of Hartford's "Stilts Building" on Church Street.

"This is the first high profile exodus from downtown Hartford in a long time," Wamester said. "It's somewhat rare."



CLOE POISSON | cpoisson@courant.com

BARRY COBURN, CEO of Coburn & Meredith, stands in his former office on the 15th floor at Goodwin Square overlooking the city of Hartford. After 75 years, the firm is leaving the city for two locations in the suburbs. Coburn is the son of one of the company's founders.

HEALTH CARE

State Official Seeks To Expand Consumer Aid

Advocate Calls For Federal Standards To Protect The Insured

By **KENNETH R. GOSSELIN**
kgosselin@courant.com

As health care reform gains momentum in Congress, Connecticut's health care advocate Monday called for federal standards to protect consumers in their dealings with health insurance plans.

Connecticut has made significant inroads in recent years in strengthening consumer protections, including instituting independent reviews when a health plan denies coverage of a treatment or procedure.

But Kevin Lembo, Connecticut's health care advocate, said that isn't the case in many states. Federal standards would create a "floor" that individual states could then build on, given their specific needs.

"It is an opportunity to spread those consumer protections to states that wouldn't get them any other way," Lembo said after a conference call sponsored by

Health Care for America Now, a national network of community organizations and advocacy groups that supports health care reform.

The conference call was designed to draw attention to the lack of competition in the health insurance industry and the need for a health plan offered by federal and state governments.

Federal consumer protections have been included in the various reform bills in Congress.

While Connecticut has been progressive in protecting consumers, more still needs to be done, Lembo said.

The dispute over proposed premium increases on individual plans by Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield earlier this year highlighted the need for Lembo's office and the attorney general to have the right to intervene in rate cases if either sees it as necessary, Lembo said.

Similar rights would fit well in federal standards, he said.

UTILITIES

NU's Net Income Declines In 3Q

Mild Summer, Recession, Unpaid Bills Among Reasons For Decline

Staff Reports

Mild summer weather, the recession and the absence of one-time gains led to a decline in third-quarter net income for Hartford-based Northeast Utilities, the company said Monday.

NU earned a net \$64.8 million, or 37 cents a share, in the three months ended Sept. 30. That was down from \$72.7 million, or 47 cents a share in the 2008 third quarter.

Charles Shivery, the NU chairman and chief executive officer, said he was satisfied with the performance, and that the decline was anticipated. But he said the results bolster arguments for higher electric rates.

Sales of electricity in the Connecticut Light & Power business were down 5 percent, most of which was attributable to milder weather, the company said.

Earnings from distribution and generation totaled \$22.5 million, down from \$35.5 million, as Connecticut Light & Power

fell by more than half, to \$11.4 million. Yankee Gas, whose profits are part of the distribution business, saw a 5.8 percent increase in natural gas sales, but reported a net loss of \$4.5 million for the quarter due to uncollected bills, compared with a \$2.3 million loss one year earlier.

Transmission earnings were \$42.8 million, up from \$35.9 million. NU's non-regulated competitive businesses earned \$300,000, down from \$4.6 million.

"Our electric distribution segment has been the part of our company most impacted by the economy and volatile financial markets, which have caused sales declines and rising uncollectable receivable balances and pension expense," Shivery said. "While strong cost management efforts have offset some of the impact of the economy, rate relief is pivotal to maintaining the financial health of this segment, which builds and maintains critical energy delivery infrastructure and [is] central to implementing many of the region's energy policies."