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U.S. SEIZES FOOD AT WAREHOUSE IN STREAMWOOD AFTER ALLEGING RODENT INFESTATION

CHICAGO — United States Marshals, acting on behalf of the Food and Drug Administration, today seized various food products stored under allegedly unsanitary conditions, including widespread and active rodent infestation, at a warehouse in Streamwood. The action was taken after the United States filed a civil lawsuit Friday and obtained a warrant from a federal judge to seize the products at the warehouse operated by Chetak Chicago, LLC, announced Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois. The suit alleges that all the food held in the facility, except that found in the freezer and glass or metal containers, is subject to seizure and condemnation because it was stored under allegedly unsanitary conditions.

The 108,000-square-foot Chetak warehouse, located at 1111 East Lake St., in Streamwood, stores a variety of food, including rice, flour, shelled peanuts, cookies, dried coconut and spices. Chetak receives food products from across the United States and India and sells products to restaurants, retailers and distribution centers in approximately 20 states and Canada. No food items have left the warehouse since Aug. 17, 2011, when the Illinois Department of Public Health imposed an embargo preventing any food from being removed.

The FDA's Office of Criminal Investigations executed a federal search warrant at the Chetak warehouse at the same as today's civil seizure.

According to the civil complaint, the FDA inspected the warehouse between Aug. 15 and Sept. 1, 2011, and found 25 live and 12 dead rodents, numerous gnawed and urine-stained packages of food, and apparent rodent excreta pellets on, in, and around food packages in the facility. Inspectors also allegedly found rodent nesting materials and structural defects within the building, including gaps in doors and the foundation, that permit easy pest access to the warehouse. They also observed debris outside the building that can harbor rodents. FDA investigators conducted a follow-up inspection on Sept. 23 and 27, and found that the alleged violations continued to exist.

The Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act permits the seizure and condemnation of food shipped in interstate commerce that has been “adulterated,” or held for sale under unsanitary conditions where it might have been contaminated with filth.

Mr. Fitzgerald and other officials emphasized that there are no known immediate public health risks posed by the seized food and that no incidents of illness have been traced to products stored at the warehouse.

The government is being represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Donald Lorenzen. In a civil case, the government has the burden of proving its case by a preponderance of the evidence.

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