

## “No Added Plastic” . . . Chewing Products to Avoid

Following are a few examples of what consumers are up against in determining what their dogs’ chews actually contain. They are not isolated examples but typical of the industry as a whole. Next time you go dog shopping, turn your skepticism way up, and *do not buy the items described here*. Our list of recommended chew items can be found through another link in this story.

### Most Rawhide Chews

For many dogs, rawhide chews provide a long-lasting and intensely pleasurable chewing experience. Purchased in bulk, rawhide is reasonably priced. In addition, chews help in reducing dental accretions, a significant factor in long-term health. They are not without hazards, however. Most people are aware of the

dangers of choking on rawhide ends and potential intestinal blockage, which should make rawhide chewing a supervised and limited activity for all dogs.

But few of us know very much about the potentially dangerous toxins used to turn cow hides into dog toys. It is, by necessity, chemical intensive. Fresh hides must be preserved during transport or storage. The hair must be removed and the hides cured to prevent spoilage. Many of the bargain chews are imported from tanneries in Asia, where uncontrolled chemical use

has caused catastrophic pollution of rivers and aquifers. (We found one company, IPSD Inc., of San Diego, California, whose rawhide products are labeled as originating in Argentina, Canada, China, Ecuador, and



Thailand – clearly, wherever cheap hides are available.) Among the residues sometimes found in recklessly processed hides are lead, arsenic, mercury, chromium salts, formaldehyde, and more.

While the USDA has jurisdiction over animal products imported into the U.S., in practice this means very little. Importation of rawhide products requires only formalities: an import license and a certificate of origin. In effect, we rely on local officials in exporting countries (with horrendous tannery-caused pollution problems) to certify the safety of products our dogs eat. Are U.S. rawhides safer? Probably yes, but caution is required. The fact remains that chemical processing is a practical manufacturing necessity, as any ethical maker will tell you.

Frank Burkholder's Ecology Rawhide Company, for example, buys range-fed South American cattle hides, thus avoiding the pesticide, antibiotic and hormone concentrations found in U.S. feedlot hides. "The trick," Burkholder said, "is buying clean hides, using minimal processing, and then washing those hides in tremendous amounts of water."

A few other companies allege that all of the hides used in their own brand of rawhide chews are made from American cattle and manufactured in America. One company's catalog claims, "Because all of the processing is done here in the USA, the hides are quickly transported between processing facilities in climate controlled trucks, therefore no chemical treatment or preservatives are needed to prevent spoilage."

It comes down to this: Any company that claims to use chemical-free hides or hides that have been treated to remove chemicals, describes that process to your satisfaction, and is willing to stake its reputation on the matter is light-years ahead of its competitors – even though in all likelihood no agency will be seeking to verify the accuracy of the claims.



### Smoked Products

Few "smoked" dog treats have ever seen the inside of a smokehouse: They are baked in giant ovens, and preserved, along with other anti-spoilage agents, with liquid smoke distillate, a product which makes the bones smell "barbecued." Chemical smoke flavor is simply not needed to attract a dog to any bone or rawhide product. As for the

ones that *are* smoked: Wood smoke contains some 200 compounds, a number of them known to be carcinogenic, a number of others simply not good for you. In any event, for us humans, the best current advice is that we keep smoked meats to a minimum.

In both cases, the consumer has no idea what other preservatives may have been used. Yet these are products boasting a virtually unlimited shelf life; by way of comparison, natural home-made jerky needs to be consumed within a month or so.

### Pig Ears, Pig Noses, Etc.

In general, the consumer does not know how pig ears and numerous other body parts have been processed, and the maker (or marketer) is under no obligation tell you. Many pig ears and noses, however, come from chemical-intensive factory farms, where pigs are grown to market weight in a matter of months, and literally never see daylight.

Blissfully unaware of situational ethics, however, our dogs generally love these things – baked, smoked, or fried. These are really treats, not chews; most dogs devour them immediately. This is troubling, since these products are so obviously treated with chemicals: despite being organic flesh, they do not rot, and most come dyed in a variety of colors. A package of "Cowbones Brand Porky Wafers" (pig noses) made by the Pet Center, of Los Angeles, California, is a good example of a typical contradiction: it is labeled "100% Natural" and "Hickory Smoked." Go figure.

For some reason, pig ears are commonly found in unmarked bins, which is technically illegal: According to the FDA, these products should be identified by brand, contents, and address of maker.

### Plastic Chews

There are any number of chew toys made of petrochemical polymers such as polyurethane and nylon. While humans do not generally eat petrochemical polymers, no studies have been done clarifying long-term health risks for dogs. Some makers hedge their bets, saying, "This product is not designed to be consumed" (this from the label of the Nylabone Chicken Flavored Pooch Pacifier), followed by "although small pieces are harmless if swallowed." The package just mentioned lists two ingredients: nylon and chicken meal. A couple of questions? If this is not meant to be eaten, then why include chicken? Would you let your child eat nylon? If not, why would you give it to your dog? And why on earth should these products display an "ASPCA Seal of Approval" illustrated on the package? *That's* a story for another day!



On the front of another plastic chew product package is emblazoned, "No added plastic, salt, sugar, color additives or preservatives." So, *does* the product contain plastic, etc., or not?



### Booda Velvets

Let us briefly list the ingredients of this product, in order: Natural Corn Starch (whether the starch used here is human or industrial grade is left unstated); Vinyl-alcohol copolymer

(this oil-based ingredient is a chemical cousin of Elmer's Glue-All); Water; Sorbitol (a sweetener, binder, and thickener); Glycerin (a sweet-tasting by-product of soap manufacturing used to plasticize products and keep them moist). Hello? Any food in here?

Then there is the matter of the varying colors of the products, and the different "flavors" alleged on the labels: Chicken (tan colored), cheese (bright orange), bacon (brownish), and "premium" (quite red; are "premiums" red?). It's interesting that apparently different products contain identical ingredients; the labels mention nothing about the coloring agents that are so obviously present, nor the flavoring agents we'll have to assume are there. Why is a full list of the ingredients not provided?

And why not just give your dog a bone? 🐾