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### **AM - Mars Bars, Snickers recalled over poison threat**

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**Reporter: Rachel Carbonell**

ELIZABETH JACKSON: Tens of thousands of chocolate bars are this morning being taken off the shelves at more than 5,000 retailers across New South Wales, after an extortion threat was made against the manufacturer.

All Mars and Snickers bars are being recalled because of fears seven bars might have been poisoned with an unknown substance.

The manufacturer, MasterFoods, has received three letters since May, but the final letter yesterday contained a contaminated chocolate bar and it sparked the decision to conduct the voluntary recall.

Neither the police nor MasterFoods will elaborate on the details of the extortion attempt, saying only that the letters were rambling and their intent unclear.

Rachel Carbonell compiled this report.

ANDY WESTON-WEBB: No one should eat a Mars or Snickers bar that they have bought. Please destroy it. No one should eat it. It is not safe to eat Mars or Snickers bars.

RACHEL CARBONELL: The President of MasterFoods, Andy Weston-Webb, with a clear warning for chocolate lovers in New South Wales.

His company is the victim of an extortion threat, communicated via three different letters over the last month.

Mr Weston-Webb says the third letter arrived yesterday, and convinced the company and police that the threat was real enough to start a massive recall.

ANDY WESTON-WEBB: This letter states that seven bars of Mars and Snickers have been, or may have been, placed in the Sydney area, in a retail outlet.

My only concern here is to remove the threat, of any possible threat to the public, so we've done everything we can immediately to instigate a recall. We'll continue to cooperate with the police at every point, and with the health authorities, and we've been doing so.

And thankfully, I'm not aware of anybody being taken ill at this point.

RACHEL CARBONELL: The third letter also contained a contaminated Snickers bar.

But the Commander of the Robbery and Serious Crime Squad in New South Wales, Detective Superintendent Peter Cotter, says little is known about what it was contaminated with, or how dangerous it is.

PETER COTTER: I can state that one of the letters to MasterFoods Victoria was accompanied by a Snickers bar which had obviously been opened, and obviously had been tampered with. It was quite apparent. There is a foreign contaminant definitely within the bar. As to what that substance is, chemically or physically, we are not aware.

RACHEL CARBONELL: Detective Superintendent Peter Cotter says police can't go into the details of the extortion threat, except to say that it was probably made by an individual and was fairly unclear.

PETER COTTER: It would be fair to say that the substance of those letters were ramblings, and the exact intent was not known.

What those letters did pose was a threat, or a veiled threat, to contaminate chocolate bars.

RACHEL CARBONELL: Police are supportive of MasterFoods' decision to wait until now to conduct a recall of the chocolate bars, saying the threat of contamination on just became clear.

The Consumer Law Centre has also commended the company's actions.

Spokesman Natasha Leigh says the recall will be a big job, and will need to be monitored carefully.

NATASHA LEIGH: They would have to balance the costs of doing this, but they do have obligations under the Trade Practices Act to carry out recall activity where there is an imminent threat, particularly an emergency like this where there's a serious risk of illness.

What I hope though is that the MasterFoods organisation actually has a sufficient compliance plan and that its recall activities are broad enough to ensure that they are properly implementing the recall and ensuring that all outlets are canvassed, including things like vending machines.

RACHEL CARBONELL: Food Standards Australia New Zealand is the organisation responsible for overseeing the recall, and a spokeswoman says so far the system is working well.

It's not the first extortion threat of this kind in Australia.

In 2000, Herron Pharmaceuticals and the manufacturers of Panadol received threats, and several people were admitted to hospital after taking painkillers believed to be laced with the rat poison.

And eight years ago, the food manufacturer Arnotts was forced to undertake an expensive recall after it became the victim of a high profile extortion threat.

ELIZABETH JACKSON: Rachel Carbonell with that report.

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