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FAULTY TONGS LINKED TO FOOD CONTAMINATION SCARE

Authorities investigating what was believed to have been a meat contamination scare in several states have linked the discovery of sharp metal pieces in meat products to kitchen faulty tongs.

South Australian Consumer Affairs Minister, Jennifer Rankine, says that police, health and consumer affairs officials here, in Qld and NSW have been investigating the problem when it emerged last month and originally suspected a criminal motive could have been behind the scare.

“Products bought from Coles, Bi-Lo and Woolworths stores in several Australian towns were reported as being contaminated with distinctive, sharp metal pieces after consumers discovered metal pieces during or after the cooking process,” Ms Rankine said.

“There were two cases identified here in South Australia – both of them were in Gawler with a Coles store and a Woolworths store affected.

At the time SAPOL in conjunction with SA’s Department of Health issued a public warning for people to check their meat products and our state authorities joined forces with officials interstate to try to identify the source of the problem.

“I was advised late last night that food tampering and foul play has been ruled out. Forensic testing interstate has linked a piece of metal found in one of the pieces of meat to the tongs used by the person during cooking,” Ms Rankine said.

The tongs involved are common in many households. It appears that these tongs are being produced with a strip of metal to tension the tongs instead of older style spring mechanisms.

“It’s this little bit of metal which is believed to be behind this contamination scare. People should make sure they check the tongs in their utensils drawer for any unusual or broken spring features at the hinge of the tongs in particular. If they’re in any doubt they should throw it out and use another type of utensil,” Ms Rankine said.

Officers from the Product Safety Section of the Office of Consumer and Business Affairs, along with their interstate counterparts, are now in the process of obtaining and testing tongs which are sold in supermarkets and variety stores to identify whether a particular brand or manufacturer is the problem.

Anyone who finds they have tongs that may be a problem should contact OCBA’s Product Safety section on 8152 0732.