

# Food Safety News

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## Publisher's Platform: Time to Discard That Wire Brush?

By Bill Marler | November 18, 2014

Internal injuries from ingestion of wire grill-cleaning bristles are well documented. In a single hospital system, 12 patients with injuries due to ingestion of wire bristles were reported between July 2009 and June 2012. The severity of injury ranged from puncture of the soft tissues of the neck, causing severe pain on swallowing, to perforation of the gastrointestinal tract requiring emergency surgery.[1]

On May 29, 2012, U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer, joined by Chuck Bell, programs director at Consumers Union, called on the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to determine whether metal bristle grill brushes are safe for consumer use.[2] Two men from New Jersey and Washington state had also been recently hospitalized and underwent emergency surgery after accidentally swallowing a metal bristle that had broken off their grill brushes and become attached to their food. Schumer called on the CPSC and the FDA to launch a review of whether the bristles are safe and to issue warnings to consumers about the dangers of ingesting metal grill bristles.

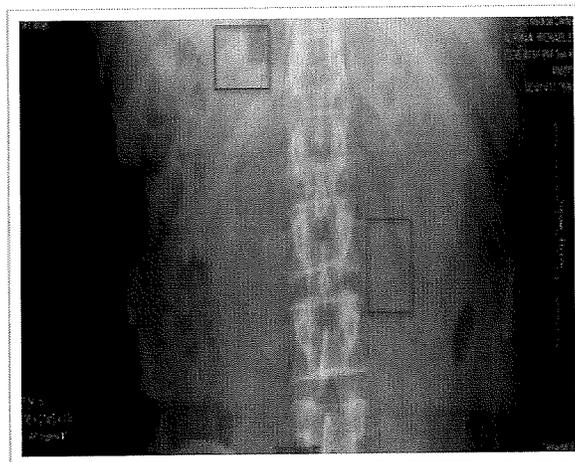
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends actions to prevent these injuries by increasing awareness among consumers, manufacturers, retailers and medical professionals to promote prevention, timely diagnosis and appropriate treatment. In an editorial published in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), the agency suggests that awareness on the part of manufacturers and retailers of the risk of ingesting wire bristles might encourage alteration of current products or development of safer ones. The CDC recommends those in the food services industry "examine whether their patrons are at risk for this injury" and advises the "use of alternative grill-cleaning methods or products." [3]

Recently, on the evening of Friday, September 19, 2014, Diane Norman bought pizzas at Domino's Pizza located at 2800 Milton Way in Milton, Washington. She took the pizzas home for her family to consume. Michael Norman chose two slices of Canadian bacon and pineapple pizza and took a bite of one slice. He swallowed and immediately felt something sharp in his throat. He started to choke and dashed to the sink to drink water to help clear his throat. At this point he felt a sharp tearing at his throat and drank a glass of cranberry juice. His throat felt scratched and to relieve his pain he ate a slice of bread. Although this action eliminated the feeling that

food was lodged in his throat, Michael felt a dull pain in his stomach. Since he no longer felt hungry, he did not eat any more pizza. Diane Norman froze the remaining leftover pizza. Sometime later she examined the frozen pizza slices and found a wire in a piece of the pizza she had saved.

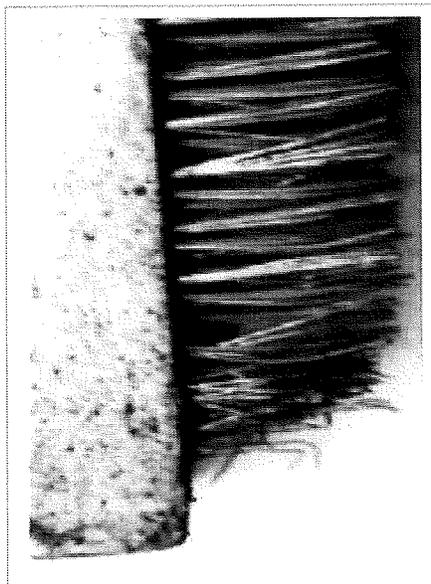


Over the next few days Michael continued to feel a dull pain in his abdomen. His doctor ordered x-rays, which showed two metallic objects inside his abdomen. A CT scan revealed that one of the metal objects had punctured his small intestine. After a failed attempt to remove the metal objects via endoscopy, Michael was rushed into surgery on September 27. It was then that surgeons removed two wires from Michael Norman's intestines.



On September 30 Michael Norman filed a complaint with the Tacoma Pierce County Health Department. In response to his complaint, TPCHD environmental health specialist, Christina Sherman, conducted an on-site investigation at the Domino's in Milton. Ms. Sherman reviewed the pizza making process with Domino's employee, James Tyler. She noted that a wire brush was used to clean a wire rack inside the oven at the end of each day. Ms. Sherman also observed wear

on some of the brush bristles. This wear was evident in photos of the brush taken by Ms. Sherman.



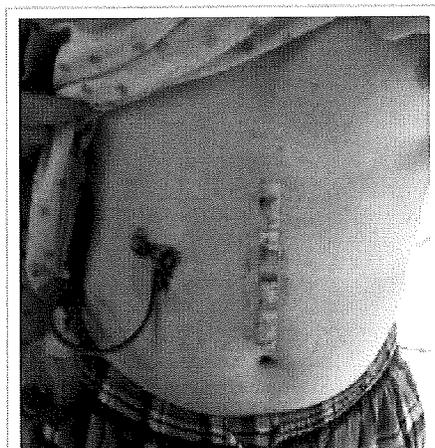
On October 8 Michael Johnson at TPCHD conducted a second on-site visit to Domino's. Mr. Johnson wrote in the inspection report:

Observed a wire brush with food debris between the wires. Wires on the brush were bent and pointing in different directions and did not maintain its original design. Employee stated they had another brush that was used to clean the oven but was discarded last week. Person in charge stated the outside of the oven is cleaned every night and the inside of the oven is cleaned once a month using the brush.

Ms. Johnson advised that "equipment and utensils must be designed and construction to be durable and to retain their characteristic qualities under normal use conditions."

The wire brush was discarded.

Perhaps that is what all of us should do? Michael has the scars to prove it.





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[1] Grand DJ, Egglin TK, Mayo-Smith WW. et al. Injuries from ingesting wire bristles dislodged from grill-cleaning brushes – Providence, Rhode Island, 2009-2012. J. Safety Res. 2012 Dec. 43 (5-6):413-5.)

[2] <http://www.schumer.senate.gov/Newsroom/record.cfm?id=336895>

[3] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Injuries from ingestion of wire bristles from grill-cleaning brushes – Providence, Rhode Island, March 2011-June 2012. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2012 Jul 6;61(26):490-492.)

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