

How a decade saw the rise of a deadly new terrorism

by Andrew Don



Helen Coppock and daughter Victoria, who choked on baby food spiked with razor blades

DELIBERATE food contamination was virtually unknown 10 years ago.

But in the 1980s "the new terrorism", as it became known, sent the food industry reeling.

Its power was brought home in Chicago in 1982 when seven people died after taking Tylenol capsules for headaches. They were spiked with potassium cyanide.

The number of reported incidents in the US climbed from 120 in 1985 to 1760 a year later.

Animal rights activists caught on to the idea in the United Kingdom in 1984 with the contamination of shampoo with bleach.

Later that year activists claimed they had contaminated Mars confectionery. Although this proved a hoax, the company lost sales worth an £15 million.

In 1989 contamination in the UK reached new levels. Glass in crisps, baked beans, coleslaw and nappies; razor blades in baby food and weedkiller in grape juice.

After the Mars hoax, manufacturers developed contingency plans and offered to share their experience.

The crime of product contamination was included in the Public Order Act, 1986, and the Home Office set up a special unit to handle contamination crime.

Companies have tried to stem the problem with an increased use of tamper-resistant or tamper-evident packaging.

Heinz and Cow & Gate reacted quickly to the baby food tampering scares by introducing shrink-wrapped plastic sleeves.

But if this type of packaging becomes the norm, it will cost the industry millions of pounds and force up prices.

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Tarrant signs off.

Capital Radio DJ, Chris Tarrant, will be at Claude Gill signing copies of "Ready, Steady, Go!" - Growing up in the Sixties, published by Hamlyn, on Tuesday 18th December, 12.30 - 1.30pm. If you can't be there, ring 071-434 9759 to reserve your signed copy.

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