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BROADCAST TRANSCRIPT

ANA GARCIA, co-anchor:

Now an NBC 4 exclusive investigation reveals yet another way the food that you buy in Southern California supermarkets or eat in local restaurants could get contaminated. Our investigative reporter Joel Grover has been uncovering food safety dangers for years, and he's here now with this special report.

Joel.

JOEL GROVER reporting:

Well, Ana, it's something most consumers never even think about--how food gets from the farm to our plates. Now, consumer experts are taking a closer look at the process and they're zeroing in on one particular way food could get contaminated and make you sick.

You see them everyday at your local supermarket--wood pallets used to transport food from the supplier to the market, or to restaurants. But along the way those pallets come in contact with rodents, with insects, with bacteria from raw meat and fish, and now tests done by two groups show some pallets are contaminated with dangerous bacteria that can spread to the food that comes in contact with them.

Ms. SALLY GREENBERG (National Consumers League): Pallets can harbor pathogens and other dangerous bacteria that could potentially contaminate the food system and harm American consumers.

GROVER: This spring the nonprofit National Consumers League tested dozens of pallets in Florida and Texas.

Ms. GREENBERG: We've got bird poop here.

GROVER: And they found deadly E. coli and listeria on some of the pallets. I spoke with the head of the National Consumers League via Skype.

What are the results of your testing?

Ms. GREENBERG: We didn't have to look hard to find filthy, dirty pallets that are sit out in back of stores.

GROVER: Now, tests done in the LA area have show one out of every six wood pallets tested harbor dangerous bacteria. The tests, analyzed by an independent lab, were paid for a company that's developed a plastic pallet alternative. Tests by both groups verify a food safety problem first uncovered by NBC 4 three years ago at LA's huge Seventh Street produce market, which provides food to thousands of restaurants and markets. We found pallets of food lying in pools of filthy water. When we sampled the water seeping into the pallets, our tests also found harmful bacteria. Our investigation

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prompted a clean-up of the market.

Ms. GREENBERG: You could have seafood that was on ice dripping onto pallets that are open that are full of produce, say raspberries or lettuce.

GROVER: The National Consumers League found plastic pallets are somewhat safer than wood, but they can also harbor some bacteria. So the group is now calling on the FDA to require that all pallets be cleaned and disinfected after each use.

Ms. GREENBERG: And there's no real control over them right now. We want the FDA take a really close look at this.

GROVER: And the FDA tells us it's now doing its own research into the safety of pallets and it will decide what, if any, action it will take in a few months down the road. And we also heard from the National Wood Pallet and Container Association; they say wood pallets are a safe way to transport food, but they also say they will fully cooperate with the FDA's investigation and they're not opposed to some government regulation.

Chuck and Ana.