

HONORABLE RICARDO S. MARTINEZ
Hearing Date: May 4, 2007
Without Oral Argument

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON AT SEATTLE

MICHELLE SUGGETT and DON JAMES,
individually and on behalf of all similarly
situated;

Plaintiffs,

v.

MENU FOODS, a foreign corporation; THE
IAMS COMPANY, a foreign corporation;
EUKANUBA, a foreign corporation; DOG
FOOD PRODUCERS NUMBERS 1-100 and
CAT FOOD PRODUCERS 1-100; and DOES
1-100;

Defendants.

No. CV 07-0457 RSM

DEFENDANT MENU FOODS'
MOTION TO STAY ALL
PROCEEDINGS

**NOTE ON MOTION CALENDAR
MAY 4, 2007**

Without Oral Argument

Defendant MENU FOODS moves this Court to stay all proceedings in this action pending a transfer decision by the Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation ("JPML") pursuant to U.S.C. §1407 and pending a determination of class certification by the transferor court pursuant to Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 23(d)(1). In support thereof, Defendant sets forth the following:

DEFENDANT MENU FOODS' MOTION TO
STAY ALL PROCEEDINGS – CV 07-0457 RSM -

I. INTRODUCTION

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2 Currently, there are at least fifty-seven (57) actions that seek relief for individuals who
3 purchased allegedly contaminated pet food from Defendant. Federal courts have original
4 jurisdiction over these state and common law based actions pursuant to the Class Action
5 Fairness Act of 2005. 28 U.S.C. §1332(d). Specifically, the pending cases allege that
6 Defendant sold contaminated pet food to the general public and individuals whose pets
7 consumed this pet food sustained injuries and/or death. The pending cases seek to certify a
8 class of United States' residents who purchased allegedly contaminated pet food and seek to
9 compensate them for all damages incurred as a result of Defendant's conduct. None of the
10 pending cases are advanced and no discovery has been conducted. The actions are currently
11 pending in the Western District of Washington, Eastern District of Tennessee, Northern
12 District of Illinois, Western District of Wisconsin, Western District of Arkansas, District of
13 New Jersey, Northern District of Florida, Southern District of Florida, District of Connecticut,
14 Central District of California, District of Rhode Island, District of Maine, Northern District of
15 California, District of Nevada, District of Idaho and Northern District of Ohio.

A. Pending MDL Motions

16
17 On March 30, 2007, three (3) separate motions for transfer and coordination or
18 consolidation pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1407 were filed by three (3) different plaintiffs.
19 Plaintiff Shirley Sexton filed the first MDL motion, seeking to transfer her case and numerous
20 other cases involving alleged injuries and/or death arising out of the purchase and/or
21 consumption of pet food manufactured by Defendant to the Central District of California. *See*
22 Plaintiff Sexton's MDL Motion attached hereto as Exhibit "A." Plaintiff Christina Troiano
23 filed the second MDL motion, seeking transfer to the Southern District of Florida. *See*

1 Plaintiff Troiano's MDL Motion attached hereto as Exhibit "B." Lastly, Plaintiffs Tom
2 Whaley, Stacey Heller, Toinette Robinson, David Rapp, Cecily and Terrance Mitchell,
3 Suzanne E. Johnson, Craig R. Klemann, Audrey Kornelius, Barbara Smith, Michelle Suggett
4 and Don James, filed their MDL motion to transfer the cases to the Western District of
5 Washington. *See* Plaintiff Whaley's MDL Motion attached hereto as Exhibit "C." On April
6 5, 2007, a fourth motion for transfer and coordination or consolidation was filed by Plaintiffs
7 Jayme Pittsonberger, David Carter and Jim Bullock, for transfer to the United States District
8 Court for the District of New Jersey. *See* Plaintiffs' MDL Motion attached hereto as Exhibit
9 "F." Defendant will be filing its MDL response on or before April 19, 2007, and is in
10 agreement that MDL consolidation is appropriate. On April 12, 2007, the Judicial Panel on
11 Multidistrict Litigation ("JPML") issued a Notice of Hearing Session for May 31, 2007 to
12 consider the MDL motions ("Collectively known as MDL 1850 - *In re Pet Food Products*
13 *Liability Litigation*). *See* April 12, 2007 Notice of Hearing Session attached hereto as Exhibit
14 "D."

15 **B. Instant Case**

16 On March 27, 2007, Plaintiffs filed a products liability action in the Western District
17 of Washington, alleging that Plaintiffs' pets sustained injuries and/or death as a result of the
18 purchase and/or consumption of pet food manufactured by Defendant. *See* Plaintiffs'
19 Complaint attached hereto as Exhibit "E." Defendant now respectfully requests this Court to
20 stay all proceedings pending a transfer decision by the JPML and a determination of class
21 certification by the transferor court.

II. SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

1
2 A stay of all proceedings in this action pending a transfer decision by the JPML and a
3 determination of class certification by the transferor court is necessary to promote judicial
4 economy and avoid undue prejudice to the parties. Due to the pending MDL motions and
5 pending motions for class certification, a stay of proceedings in this case is necessary and
6 appropriate to further the interests of judicial economy. This Court should not unnecessarily
7 use its resources and time to supervise pre-trial proceedings and make rulings in a case, which
8 may shortly be transferred to another district court and/or judge for further pre-trial
9 proceedings. Additionally, since all the actions are in the beginning stages of litigation and
10 the Judicial Panel will be hearing the MDL motions on May 31, 2007, no prejudice or
11 inconvenience will result from entry of a stay. *See* Exhibit "D." On the other hand, absent a
12 stay, Defendant will be substantially prejudiced if it is required to duplicate efforts and
13 expend significant resources defending multiple cases in jurisdictions around the country. For
14 the reasons herein stated, Defendant respectfully moves this Court for an order staying all
15 proceedings in this case pending a transfer decision by the JPML and a determination of class
16 certification by the transferee court.

III. ARGUMENT

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18 Numerous courts have stayed proceedings pending determinations by the MDL Panel
19 of the appropriateness of coordination under Section 1407. *See, e.g., Gonzalez, v. American*
20 *Home Products, Corp.*, 223 F.Supp.2d 803 (S.D.Tex. 2002); *U.S. Bank, Nat'l Ass'n v. Royal*
21 *Indem. Co.*, 2002 WL 31114069 (N.D. Tex. Sept.23, 2002); *Moore v. Wyeth-Ayerst*
22 *Laboratories*, 236 F.Supp.2d 509, 511 (D. Md. 2002); *Kohl v. American Home Prods. Corp.*,
23 78 F. Supp. 2d 885 (W.D. Ark. 1999); *Republic of Venezuela v. Philip Morris Companies*,

1 *Inc., et. al.*, 1999 WL 33911677 (S.D. Fla. 1999); *Rivers v. The Walt Disney Co.*, 980 F. Supp.
2 1358 (C.D. Cal. 1997); *American Seafood, Inc. v. Magnolia Processing*, 1992 WL 102762
3 (E.D. Pa. May 7, 1992); *Arthur-Magna, Inc. v. Del-Val Fin Corp.*, 1991 WL 13725 (D. N.J.
4 Feb. 1, 1991); *Rosenfeld v. Hartford Fire Ins. Co.*, 1988 WL 49065 (S.D. N.Y. May 12,
5 1988); *Portnoy v. Zenith Laboratories*, 1987 WL 10236 (D.D.C. Apr. 21, 1987). It is
6 “incidental to the power inherent in every court to control the disposition of the cases on its
7 docket with the economy of time and effort for itself, for counsel, and for litigants.” *Landis v.*
8 *North American Co.*, 299 U.S. 248, 254 (1936). Guided by the “policies of justice and
9 efficiency,” this Court should exercise its discretion to stay all further proceedings in this
10 action pending the MDL Panel’s action. *Boudreaux v. Metropolitan Life Ins. Co.*, 1995 WL
11 83788, *1 (E.D. La. Feb. 24, 1995).

12 When considering a motion to stay, the Court typically considers three factors: (1)
13 potential prejudice to the non-moving party; (2) hardship and inequity to the moving party if
14 the action is not stayed; and (3) the judicial resources that would be saved by avoiding
15 duplicative litigation if the cases are in fact consolidated. *Rivers*, 980 F.Supp. at 1360. In the
16 case *sub judice*, each enumerated factor favors a stay. Thus, this Court should stay all
17 proceedings pending a transfer decision by the Judicial Panel and a determination of class
18 certification by the transferor court.

19 **A. Judicial Economy Mandates a Stay Pending a Transfer Decision by the Judicial
20 Panel and Determination of Class Certification**

21 Considerations of judicial economy weigh heavily in favor of a stay. First, the express
22 language of 28 U.S.C. §1407 provides that civil actions may be transferred for coordinated or
23 consolidated pretrial proceedings to “promote the just and efficient conduct of such actions.”
28 U.S.C. §1407. Second, it is well settled that in the class action context that when similar

1 actions are proceeding in different courts, courts may stay proceedings pending the outcome
2 of the other case. Wright, Miller & Kane, *Federal Practice and Procedure: Civil 3D* §1792
3 (2005); *Knearem v. Bayer Corp.*, 2002 WL 1173551, 1 (D. Kan. 2002) (granted motion to stay
4 to purported class action which was one of more than two hundred pending federal cases,
5 nearly half of which were purported class actions). Here, a stay of proceedings pending a
6 transfer decision by the MDL and class certification is necessary and appropriate to achieve
7 the judicial economies that underlie §1407 and class actions.

8 Defendant reasonably anticipates that the Judicial Panel will grant an MDL for the
9 following reasons. First, courts have consistently held that the Judicial Panel will transfer
10 cases to eliminate the possibility of inconsistent class determinations. *In re CertainTeed*
11 *Corp. Roofing Shingle Prods Liab. Lit.*, 2007 WL 549356; *In re Guidant Corp. Implantable*
12 *Defibrillators Prods. Liab. Lit.*, 398 F. Supp. 2d 1371 (Jud. Pan. Mult. Lit. 2005); *In re Ford*
13 *Motor Co. Speed Control Deactivation Switch Prods. Liab. Lit.* 398 F. Supp.. 2d 1365 (Jud.
14 Pan. Mult. Lit. 2005); *In re Roadway Exp. Inc. Employ. Pract. Lit.*, 384 F. Supp. 612 (Jud.
15 Pan. Mult. Lit. 1974). Absent a transfer of these cases to a single forum for coordinated and
16 consolidated pretrial proceedings, there is a substantial risk of inconsistent and/or conflicting
17 pretrial rulings on discovery and other key issues, such as class certification. Second,
18 discovery with respect to the Defendant's conduct in each of the actions proposed for
19 consolidation will be substantially similar and will involve the same and/or similar documents
20 and witnesses. Third, efficiency in the administration of justice will be served by
21 consolidation, because one judge rather than multiple judges can supervise all pretrial
22 proceedings and render rulings that are consistent. Fourth, based on the nationwide
23

1 distribution of Defendant's pet food, many additional cases may be filed before the statute of
2 limitations expires.

3 Absent a stay, the Court will lose the potential efficiencies that would be gained by
4 having pretrial issues, particularly with respect to issues of class certification, decided by a
5 single court. In *Gonzalez v. American Home Products, Corp.*, consumers brought a product
6 liability action against manufacturers and distributors of phenylpropanolamine (PPA) to
7 recover for physical injuries sustained as a result of exposure to PPA. *Gonzalez*, 223
8 F.Supp.2d at 804. In granting defendants' motion to stay pending a decision of the MDL
9 Panel, the Court held that "[j]udicial economy and consistency of result dictate that this key
10 issue be decided once, not countless times." *Gonzales*, 223 F.Supp.2d at 805.

11 Like *Gonzalez*, the interests of judicial economy and consistency warrant a stay here.
12 Without a stay, this Court will be required to expend its time and resources familiarizing itself
13 with the intricacies and complexities of this complicated products liability litigation that may
14 be transferred to another court. Alternatively, if the Judicial Panel assigns the case to this
15 Court, each ruling and action taken by this Court may affect other cases without giving the
16 attorney handling those cases an opportunity to provide input to the Court. Clearly, if these
17 cases are not stayed, many issues particularly with respect to class certification, will have to
18 be revisited by the Court assigned to the cases by the Judicial Panel. Thus, the continuation of
19 this case will result in duplicative and unnecessary efforts by this Court and the parties if this
20 action proceeds forward before the Judicial Panel has an opportunity to rule.

21 Additionally, if a stay is not granted and this case proceeds forward, the Court's
22 rulings potentially could be reconsidered after coordination. "The pretrial powers of the
23 transferee court include the powers to modify, expand, or vacate earlier discovery orders." *In*

1 *re Plumbing Fixture Cases*, 298 F. Supp. 484, 489 (J.P.M.L. 1968). In *Kohl v. American*
2 *Home Prods. Corp.*, a consumer brought a products liability action against manufacturers,
3 distributors and sellers of the pharmaceutical drugs, fenfluramine and phentermine, to recover
4 for injuries allegedly caused by the drugs. *Kohl*, 78 F. Supp. 2d at 887. In granting
5 defendants' motion to stay pending the transfer of the case to the MDL Panel, the Court held
6 that judicial economy would be best served if litigation was facilitated in the appropriate
7 forum. *Kohl*, 78 F. Supp. 2d at 888. "If the MDL motion is granted, all of the Court's time,
8 energy and acquired knowledge regarding the action and its pretrial procedures will be
9 wasted." *U.S. Bank*, 2002 WL 31114069 at *2.

10 This Court, like the district court in *Kohl*, should not expend its limited resources
11 "familiarizing itself with the intricacies of a case that would be heard [for pre-trial purposes]
12 by another judge." *Rivers*, 980 F. Supp. at 1360. Moreover, this Court should abstain from
13 scheduling additional status conferences and/or issuing additional discovery orders because
14 "any efforts on behalf of this Court concerning case management will most likely have to be
15 replicated by the judge that is assigned to handle the consolidated litigation." *Id.*
16 Furthermore, to avoid the risk of inconsistent substantive legal rulings, pretrial proceedings in
17 this matter and other actions should proceed in an orderly, coordinated fashion, as directed by
18 the single court selected by the Judicial Panel. Accordingly, a stay in this case is appropriate
19 as it will further the just and efficient conduct of this litigation.

20 **B. The Balance of Equities Weigh Heavily in Favor of a Stay as Plaintiffs Will**
21 **Suffer No Prejudice, While Defendant Will Suffer Undue Hardship Absent a Stay**

22 In addition to the waste of judicial resources inherent in proceeding with this matter
23 prior to a ruling by the Judicial Panel, the balance of the parties' hardships strongly favors a
stay. In *Moore v. Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories*, a patient who took a prescription diet drug

1 brought a products liability action against the drug manufacturer. *Moore*, 236 F.Supp.2d at
2 511. The court in that case held that the potential prejudice to the drug manufacturer
3 warranted a stay of proceedings pending the decision of Judicial Panel for transfer and
4 consolidation. *Id.* Specifically, the court held that “[c]entralization is...necessary in order to
5 eliminate duplicative discovery, prevent inconsistent or repetitive pretrial rulings...and
6 conserve the resources of the parties, their counsel, and the judiciary.” *Id.*

7 Defendant in the present action would be substantially prejudiced by duplicative
8 discovery and motion practice if a stay is not put in place. *American Seafood*, 1992 WL
9 102762 at *2 (holding that “[t]he duplicative motion practice and discovery proceedings
10 demonstrate that judicial economy and prejudice to the defendants weigh heavily in favor of a
11 stay”). Without a stay, Defendant may continue to be served with discovery requests,
12 deposition notices and various motions resulting in duplicative and costly responses and
13 replies being prepared multiple times in different jurisdictions. This burden is a clear,
14 definable hardship weighing in favor of staying this action until the MDL Panel renders its
15 decision.

16 A stay will not, however, unduly prejudice the Plaintiff in this matter. In *Republic of*
17 *Venezuela v. Philip Morris Companies, Inc., et. al.*, The Republic of Venezuela sought
18 damages from the defendants due to, *inter alia*, costs allegedly incurred as a result of paying
19 for “medical care, facilities, and services” for Venezuelan residents injured as a result of the
20 use of tobacco. *Republic of Venezuela* 1999 WL 33911677, *1. The Court in granting
21 Defendant’s motion to stay held that “upon consideration of what effect a brief stay may have
22 on [Plaintiff], the Court finds that Plaintiff will not be prejudiced by the granting of a stay
23 pending the JPML’s decision.” *Id.*

1 Here, there has been no discovery in the case at bar or any of the pending actions.
2 Since all the actions are in the beginning stages of litigation, no prejudice or inconvenience
3 will result from transfer, coordination and/or consolidation. Any slight delay that Plaintiffs
4 may experience in this case will be minimal and the prejudice to Defendant would far outstrip
5 any harm to Plaintiff. *See Arthur-Magna*, 1991 WL 13725 at *1 (noting that even if a
6 temporary stay can be characterized as a delay prejudicial to plaintiffs, there are
7 considerations of judicial economy and hardship to defendants that are compelling enough to
8 warrant such a delay). Indeed, if the Judicial Panel consolidates the cases into an MDL, all of
9 the parties - including the Plaintiff here - will benefit through increased efficiency and
10 coordinated pretrial case management. Further, Defendant is not asking this Court to stay the
11 proceedings indefinitely. The Judicial Panel will be hearing the MDL motions on May 31,
12 2007. *See* Exhibit "D." Defendant is only asking the Court to issue a stay while the transfer
13 decision by the Judicial Panel and determination of class certification is pending. As such,
14 any potential delay is outweighed by the potential efficiencies available in a coordinated MDL
15 proceeding. Therefore, the benefits of staying this proceeding far outweigh any minimal
16 inconvenience to the Plaintiff. Thus, the granting of a stay is necessary and appropriate.

17 IV. CONCLUSION

18 For all of the foregoing reasons, it is appropriate for this Court to exercise its sound
19 discretion to stay these proceedings pending the decision of the Judicial Panel and a
20 determination of class certification by the transferor court. A stay would further the interests
21 of judicial economy, and promote just and efficient conduct of this litigation, while denying a
22 stay would unnecessarily waste the efforts and resources of this Court and all parties.

