

McDonald's to pay \$8.5 million in trans fat lawsuit

California man had sued over company's delays in limiting them

SAN FRANCISCO, California (Reuters) -- McDonald's has agreed to pay \$8.5 million to settle a lawsuit over artery-clogging trans fats in its cooking oils, the company said Friday.

McDonald's said it will donate \$7 million to the American Heart Association and spend another \$1.5 million to inform the public of its trans fat plans.

The settlement is the result of litigation from a San Francisco-area activist who has been seeking to raise public awareness of the health dangers from the trans fatty acids (TFAs) in hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils.

Trans fats are used in thousands of processed food products, often giving the crunch to french fries, cookies and cereals.

They are created in processing vegetable oils and have been found to be as unhealthy as pure cholesterol. The latest official U.S. nutrition recommendations suggest limiting their intake.

"McDonald's has reached an agreement to further notify our customers about the status of our ongoing initiative to reduce TFAs in our cooking oil," the company said in a statement.

Stephen Joseph, a lawyer who founded the Web site BanTransFats, sued McDonald's over complaints the firm did not properly inform the public that it had encountered delays in plans to lessen the trans fats in its cooking oils.

Joseph said his site would receive \$7,500, as would another plaintiff in the case.

"McDonald's has been successful in reducing TFA levels in our Chicken McNuggets, Crispy Chicken Sandwich and McChicken Sandwich," the fast food firm said.
"McDonald's continues to work hard on our initiative to reduce TFAs in our cooking oil."

British-born Joseph first gained publicity for his cause by suing Kraft Foods two years ago to highlight the trans fat content of much-beloved Oreo cookies. The company has since moved to remove trans fats from its snack foods.

"While there is a difference of opinion regarding whether McDonald's gave effective notice to its customers that the oil was not changed, McDonald's deserves recognition and credit for having achieved a reduction in the trans fat levels in its chicken products and for working diligently over the last two years to test additional cooking oils," Joseph

said in a statement.

Dunkin' Donuts, a unit of Britain's Allied Domecq Plc, and other companies have in recent months introduced new products free of trans fats.

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