

Tylenol on top despite scare

United Press International
NEW YORK — "I was kind of hoping this anniversary would go away, to tell you the truth," Board Chairman James Burke of Johnson & Johnson. It was last Sept. 29 that the very best of seven Chicago residents in agony from cyanide ingested in Tylenol capsules, the country's most popular pain reliever.

The deaths and the resultant national panic, which prompted the company to withdraw Tylenol from the market temporarily to add tamper-resistant packaging, are still raw in the memories of officials at Johnson & Johnson's corporate headquarters in New Brunswick, N.J.

Before the cyanide scare, Tylenol looked to show record profits for the pharmaceutical giant.

The annual report instead is titled, "An eventful year," and its cover featured a tiny picture of a Tylenol bottle. No other comment seemed necessary.

There may never have been a comparable trauma. Medicine cabinets throughout the country were stripped of Tylenol. Even David Clare, Johnson & Johnson's president, admitted he had "some hesitation" the first time he tried to allow a Tylenol after the incidents.

"It isn't that easy to put behind us," Burke said in an interview. "It still permeates the company. But no one's obsessed with it any more."

The tragedy in fact turned out to be a triumph of sorts for Johnson & Johnson, justifying the company's faith in its own reputation and management policies.

Johnson & Johnson virtually offered a free bottle of Tylenol to any household that wanted one. It blanketed the country with newspaper coupons good for \$2.50 off the price of Tylenol — making the smaller bottles cost-free. A special hot line accepted calls from consumers who wanted coupons.

Meanwhile, 2,250 Johnson & Johnson sales people made more than 1 million visits to physicians and other medical personnel, seeking support for the Tylenol reintroduction.

The company regarded support from the medical community as crucial since most Tylenol users first received the pain reliever in a hospital or reported it was recommended by a doctor.

If he had to do it again, Burke says, he isn't sure he'd do anything differently, although he admits the individual decisions made in the days following the tragedy are a blur.

"The thing that makes us feel best is our philosophy of doing business was vindicated."

Johnson & Johnson is a decentralized company which permits a great degree of freedom to its individual units.

The company has a credo, written by late J&J Chairman Robert Wood Johnson, which stresses the social responsibility of business.

"Every time business hires, builds, sells or buys it is acting for the people as well as for itself and must be prepared to accept full responsibility," it says in part.

Burke, who has made credo indoctrination sessions a requirement for new management employees, referred to the principles constantly when he announced Johnson & Johnson's comeback plans last November, and urged consumers "not to allow our lives to be ruled by acts of terrorism."

These days, he suggested, the credo seems less saccharine, "more pragmatic."

This is a company that's seriously affected by currency conversions," said Ms. Fisher. Johnson & Johnson's re-

sponse to the Tylenol crisis was both conservative and radical. It moved quickly to shore up its reputation as a reliable family friend, and made it clear it was willing to risk a great deal of money to do so.

"They did a very good job," said Bruce Miller, senior vice president at Rabin Research Co., a Chicago marketing consultant. "They operated very quickly. They were able to recapture consumer confidence by being very straightforward, and going to the heart of the matter — which was packaging."

Johnson & Johnson immediately recalled all Tylenol capsules on the market, at a pre-tax cost of \$100 million. It tested more than 8 million capsules, and fielded more than 2,000 calls from the press in the days following the poisonings.

Six weeks after the tragedy, the company announced it was reintroducing Tylenol in a new triple-sealed container.

Once the safety issue had been addressed, the company moved to get Tylenol back in America's medicine cabinets quickly — before consumers replaced their hastily-discarded bottles of pain reliever with a competitor's brand.

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