

Crisis Control Newsletter

Crisis Control Newsletter from RQA, Inc.—A Catlin Preferred Provider to Foodservice, Food Processing and Consumer Products Industries

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Improved Traceability Can Cut Costs

In a press release issued on March 4, 2013, the Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) announced the public release of their report for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that focused on the outcomes of two pilot projects designed to test and study various product tracing practices for fresh produce and processed foods. This report which was required by the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) gives the FDA recommendations on how to improve product tracing so that it benefits all stakeholders.

The report provides findings to help reduce the time it takes to resolve foodborne illness outbreaks and also helps industry to respond quicker. This would greatly reduce the impact to public health. The press release states that "Based on eight case studies of previous outbreaks, improved product tracing had the potential to reduce the public health impact by up to 55 percent of total illnesses and reduce the economic impact by up to $14 million per outbreak."

Report findings were not limited to just the impact of foodborne illness outbreaks. It also suggests that food manufacturers can benefit from improved traceability systems by being able to achieve improved business processes and increased confidence in their supply chain. Conversely, if a food company does not have dependable product tracing capabilities, then a foodborne illness event could pose a substantial risk to the company.

For example, in the event of a product recall, lack of a good product tracing system would result in broadening the scope and depth of the recall costing the company financially and possibly tarnish brand image and reduce consumer confidence in the company's ability to provide safe products. The effects could be devastating to a company. With a good traceability system, the scope and depth of a recall are known and better defined thereby reducing the time, effort and overall cost of all recall actions.

Even if you have a good traceability system, the system will only be effective if the data input into the system is consistent and standardized formats are used. Therefore, it is important to consider the way in which data is entered into the system to avoid confusion, duplication, or misinterpretation of the data.. A company needs to be able to trust the traceability system in an adverse event in order to make quick and effective decisions. This can only be accomplished if there is data integrity that will ensure accurate, meaningful data and reliable document control procedures are in place.

For the full IFT report entitled: Pilot Projects for Improving Product Tracing along the Food Supply System—Final Report, please visit:

www.ift.org/traceability.

Sources: http://www.ift.org/, http://www.foodnavigator-usa.com/Regulation/Improved-traceability-could-cut-cost-of-major-foodborne-disease-outbreak-by-14m?

IFT Pilot Study Findings

IFT conducted a pilot looking at fresh produce (tomatoes) and another pilot for processed foods (chicken, peanuts and/or spices). These foods selected for the pilots had been associated with outbreaks between 2005 and 2010. Key findings from IFT's analysis of current product tracing practices indicate the following challenges associated with outbreak investigations:

- Tedious and difficult to sort through hundreds of pages of documents
- Confusion when data definition is lacking
- Inconsistent item descriptions
- Wrong or incomplete information cause delays
- Companies operating under multiple names are difficult to identify as sources

Although FSMA limits FDA to enacting additional record-keeping requirements to "high-risk foods," outbreaks during the last several years reinforce the fact that foods previously considered "low-risk" can quickly find themselves on the "high-risk" list. Therefore, IFT suggests that FDA take the opportunity to advise the entire food industry on "best practices" for recordkeeping through the use of guidance documents.

IFT recommendations to the FDA also include:

- Clearly identify the types of data that industry needs to provide during an outbreak investigations
- Require each member of the food supply chain to develop, document and implement a product tracing plan
- Pursue the adoption of a technology platform to allow the FDA to efficiently aggregate and analyze data reported in response to regulatory requests
- Coordinate traceback investigations and develop response protocols between and among state and local health and regulatory agencies
- Offer extensive outreach and education around future regulations and expectations

"IFT expects that these recommendations will not only help protect consumers, but also help develop a better framework for industry and government to focus on food system improvements in the coming years," said IFT President John Ruff.

Food and Drug Administration Recalls (www.fda.gov)

Product: Tuna
Incident: Possible Health Risk– *Loose Seals*

A San Diego, CA firm has issued a voluntary recall of over 3 million 5 oz. cans of tuna products because the products do not meet the company's standards for seal tightness. The recalled products were sold in 48, 24 and 6 can cases and were distributed for retail sale nationwide between January 17 and February 28, 2013. Loose seals or seams could result in product contamination by spoilage organisms or pathogens and lead to illness if consumed. So far, no illnesses have been reported to date due to the consumption of these recalled tuna products. The company's top priority is to remove these recalled products from distribution and they are working closely with their sales team and retailers to help expedite the recall. Consumers who have purchased the recalled products should discard the product by disposing of it in the garbage. Consumers and media with questions should contact the company directly for more information.

Product: Potato Chips
Incident: Possible Health Risk–*Foreign Material*

A Cincinnati, OH firm is initiating a nationwide recall of all bags and boxes of certain flavors of their potato chips. These products may have the potential to contain metal fragments. The firm voluntarily recalled the products after being notified by the Ohio Department of Agriculture that there were metal shavings found in the salt applicator. Consumption of foodborne foreign objects that are hard and sharp may result in moderate or serious injury. So far, no injuries have been reported. These products were distributed to retail markets in OH, KY, IN and IL from September 15, 2012 until March 14, 2013. The firm is notifying its distributors and customers. Consumers who have purchased these products should stop using and return them to the place of purchase for a refund. Consumers with questions should contact the company directly for more information.

United States Department of Agriculture Recalls (www.usda.gov)

Product: Bolognese Sauce Products
Incident: Possible Health Risk–*Undeclared Allergen*

A Boardman, OH establishment is recalling approximately 25,000 lbs. of Bolognese sauce products because they contain the undeclared allergens soy and wheat and also contain MSG none of which are declared on the label. Included in the recall are 24 oz. jars of Bolognese pasta sauce produced on December 5, 2012 and February 6, 2013 and shipped to distributors in Ohio and Pennsylvania for further retail sales. The problem was discovered by the company during a quality control label review. The company then notified FSIS that the subcomponents of the cooked seasoned shredded beef were not included on the pasta sauce label. FSIS and the company have not received any reports or adverse reactions due to consumption of these products. Consumers and media with questions should contact the company directly for more information.

Product: Chicken Polish Sausage & Breakfast Links
Incident: Possible Health Risk–*Listeria Monocytogenes*

A Hot Springs, AK establishment is recalling approximately 6,120 pounds of chicken polish sausage and chicken breakfast link products due to possible contamination with *Listeria monocytogenes*. The products subject to recall include 30-lb. packages of chicken polish sausage and chicken breakfast links produced on February 19, 2013 and were distributed to an institution in Jackson, MI. The problem was discovered by the company through samples collected by the firm. The affected product was shipped prior to receiving the final results. FSIS and the company have not received any reports of illnesses due to consumption of these products. Consumers and media with questions about this recall should contact the company directly for more information.

Consumer Product Safety Commission Recalls (www.cpsc.gov)

Product: Activity Walker
Incident: Possible Risk-*Choking*

A Wayne, NJ importer in cooperation with the US CPSC and Health Canada are recalling approximately 9,000 units of child activity walkers. The recalled walkers were manufactured in China and sold nationwide and online from Aug. 2011 to Jan. 2013. The activity walkers have a round wooden push handle on the top of a curved triangle-shaped wooden walker base with four wooden, disc shaped wheels. The walkers have a multi-colored xylophone with 2 triangle mallets, 1 multi-colored abacus and 1 scratch noise maker on the front of the walker. The small bolt and spacer that attaches each front wheel to the walker can detach, posing a choking hazard to young children. The company has received five reports of the front wheels detaching, however no injuries have been reported. Consumers should stop using the recalled walker immediately, put it out of reach of young children and return it to the retailer for a full refund or store credit.

Product: Blankets
Incident: Possible Risk-*Burn*

A Wayne, NJ importer is recalling approximately 5,200 blankets manufactured in China and sold online and by phone from July 2012 through August 2012. The recalled blankets are 40 inch by 60 inch white, polyester blankets with LED lights that change color. The blanket has a battery compartment in a zippered pouch on the edge of the blanket. The batteries in the LED-lit blanket can overheat, posing a burn hazard. The firm has received four reports of batteries overheating, including one report of a minor burn to a finger. Consumers should stop using the recalled blankets and contact the company for a free replacement blanket. The company is contacting its customers directly to inform them about the recall. Consumers and media with questions about this recall should contact the company directly or visit their website for more information.

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