

GUIDELINES FOR THE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION IN FOOD CONTROL EMERGENCY SITUATIONS ¹

CAC/GL 19-1995 ²

PREAMBLE

1. For the purposes of these guidelines the term "food control emergency situations" is taken to mean situations where there is a clearly identified risk of serious untoward health effects associated with the consumption of certain foods. In most cases the nature of the agent causing such health effects will be known (e.g. an identified microbiological or chemical agent). However, emergency situations may arise where consumption of a certain foodstuff is associated with serious health effects but the agent causing these effects has not been identified. Such situations are also covered by these guidelines.

2. The food control authorities in exporting countries should promptly notify by telecommunication the appropriate authorities in countries which have imported or are the destination of foods with which an emergency situation has arisen. The initial information may often be incomplete and should therefore be supplemented by further notification(s) as and when the situation develops and more detailed information becomes available. Where appropriate countries should keep their public informed of food emergency situations.

3. The food control authorities in importing countries which detect problems during import control of foodstuffs which they consider to be so serious as to indicate a food control emergency situation should inform the exporting country promptly by telecommunication.

4. It is in the interests of both importing and exporting countries that information exchange in food control emergency situations is rapid. In this way risks to human health can be minimized and the foodstuffs concerned can be rapidly identified and removed from the market. This helps to prevent unwarranted action against other foods from the same country which are not involved in the emergency situation.

5. Each country should identify a primary Contact Point for food control emergency situations which can act as the national focal point for information exchange in such situations.

STANDARD FORMAT FOR INFORMATION EXCHANGE IN FOOD CONTROL EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

¹ **GOVERNMENTS AND ORGANIZATIONS INTERESTED IN RECEIVING A LIST OF CONTACTS FOR FOOD IMPORT CONTROL AND INFORMATION EXCHANGE IN FOOD CONTROL EMERGENCY SITUATIONS SHOULD CONTACT THE CODEX CONTACT POINT FOR AUSTRALIA, AUSTRALIAN QUARANTINE AND INSPECTION SERVICE, GPO BOX 858, CANBERRA 2601, ACT AUSTRALIA: TELEFAX NO. +61.6.2723103.**

² The Codex Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Control Emergency Situations were adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission at its 21st Session, 1995. They have been sent to all Member Nations and Associate Members of the FAO and WHO as an advisory text, and it is for individual governments to decide what use they wish to make of the Guidelines.

6. The most important information elements to be considered are discussed below and a standard format for information exchange in food control emergency situations is attached as an Annex.

7. Although these guidelines are primarily intended for information exchange between importing and exporting countries, copies or summaries of selected information should be provided to FAO, WHO or other international organizations on request, to assist in international food control emergency situations.

Nature of the health hazard

8. The nature of the health hazard should be described clearly and briefly. If possible, the agent (microorganism, chemical, etc.) causing the health hazard should be identified. However, if there is a clear association between consumption of a food and the appearance of serious untoward health effects this should be reported even though the agent causing the effects has not been unequivocally identified.

Foods concerned

9. In cases where the health hazard is associated with a specific food or foods these should be identified in detail in accordance with the standard format annexed to these guidelines. In other cases, where contamination is spread over a wide area and affects many different categories of foods, all such affected foods should be identified.

Action taken

10. The action taken to reduce and eliminate the hazard should be reported briefly. This may include, for affected food, at least the following:

- measures taken to identify and prevent the sale of the food;
- measures taken, at source, to prevent further problems;
- identification of agencies responsible for supervising recall from the market detaining the product and supervising its final disposition.

Contact point for further information

11. Agencies responsible for coordinating the response should keep countries receiving the affected food informed of action taken, and provide the name, address, telephone/telefax number of persons or organizations who can provide further details about the hazard, the foods concerned, action taken and other relevant information.

ANNEX**STANDARD FORMAT FOR INFORMATION EXCHANGE IN FOOD CONTROL EMERGENCY SITUATIONS**

The following should constitute the advice provided by countries in food control emergency situations.

Nature of the health hazard

- Biological/microbiological contamination (specify organism or toxin of concern).
- Chemical contamination, e.g. toxic levels of residues of pesticides, drugs, industrial chemicals, environmental contaminants.
- Radionuclide contamination (specify radionuclide(s) of concern).
- Other identified hazards (e.g. foreign bodies).
- Unknown agent - specify serious adverse health effects of associated with consumption of specified foods.

In each of the above cases, the specific hazard and its level or prevalence based on available information should be notified.

Identification of foods concerned

- Description and quantity of product(s).
- Type and size of package.
- Lot identification.
- Other identification marks/stamps, including container and shipping details.
- Name and address of producer, manufacturer, seller or importer as appropriate.

Action taken

Information on action taken (e.g. recall and/or destruction of food concern, prohibition on sale of food from certain area or establishment):

- measures taken to identify and prevent the sale of the food;

- measures taken, at source, to prevent further problems;
- measures taken to recall food from markets and to detain products and recall products from the market;
- measure taken regarding final disposition.

Contact point for further information

Name, address, telephone/telefax no. of persons or organizations who can supply further information.