Food Safety Incident Management

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Food Safety Incidents

- Usually involve a number of government agencies
- Can occur at any time
- Can range from fairly simple, localised problems to complex, multi-jurisdictional (national and international)
- Are managed under an agreed set of structures, processes and protocols

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Outline

- What is a food safety incident?
- What is incident management?
- Why develop a system?
- Features of an incident management system

Food safety incidents

- No single definition
- Common characteristics
  - Risk (actual or potential) to human health
  - Involves a physical, chemical or microbiological hazard
  - Can occur at any stage of the food supply chain
  - Requires some form of action
- Incidents will happen!

Food Safety Incidents – what we know

- Public health and safety risks
- Consumer concerns…
- Usually do not have all of the information at the start
- Scientific uncertainties
- Involve more than one agency/organisation
- Inconsistent responses
- Impact at a number of government levels
- Disruption to domestic and international trade
- May last for weeks, or months!

'Pre-washed' salads in bags aren't as clean as you may think

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- Impact…
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Impact

Consumers responded to the Food and Drug Administration's September 2006 warnings to avoid eating spinach because of possible contamination with *E. coli* O157:H7.

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Is this a food incident?

- Non-compliance with food standards.
- Perception of a risk to public health and safety.
- Specific level of risk to public health and safety.
- 'Routine' food recalls (e.g. voluntary recalls initiated by industry)
- Differences in enforcement activities across different jurisdictions.
- An incident in only one or two jurisdictions
- Terrorism and food tampering.

Challenges for Responding to incidents

- New and emerging hazards
- Uncertainties in science
- Perceptions
- Legal liabilities
- Political sensitivity

Response should be …

- Scientifically based
- Effective
- Consistent
- Legally sound
- Balanced – public health, social impacts, cost-benefit
- Well communicated

What is incident management?

- Measures to manage the risk to consumers from unsafe/unsuitable food
- A management framework that is:
  - Comprehensive and can address all hazards
  - Integrated at all levels of government and with industry
  - Contains prevention, preparation, response and recovery elements

Why develop a system?

- Frequency and complexity of incidents have increased worldwide
- Impacts to governments, industry and consumers can be significant
- Several agencies may need to respond
- Need for a consistent and timely response

What is required in a system?

- Robust
- integration of activities and resources of multiple agencies
- Operate effectively for any type of incident (imminent or actual)
- System and supporting principles can be applied broadly to food safety management

Response Protocols

- Operation, coordination and communication between agencies/jurisdictions
- Builds on existing individual organisation protocols
- Emergency management principles
- Roles and responsibilities
- Response and review phase and activities

Summary

- System need to be in place
- Networks need to be in place
- System need to be integrated
- Common command and control and coordination system
- System and roles need to be known and exercised
- Protocols need to be reviewed

An Overview of Australia's
National Food Incident Response
Protocol

Why have a Protocol?

- Ensure response and communication is timely, consistent, appropriate, coordinated
- Formalise current arrangements and link Commonwealth and State/Territory protocols
- Manage incidents for widely distributed foods

Scope

- A guidance document for coordinating the response of food regulatory agencies during a food incident

    "Any situation within the food supply chain where there is a risk, potential risk or perceived risk of illness or confirmed illness associated with the consumption of a food or foods."

    "A food incident that could, or is expected to, impact on multiple government jurisdictions."

Structure of the Protocol

- Single coordination point
- Roles and responsibilities defined
- Consultative mechanisms involving government and industry
- Response actions designed to minimise disruption to industry/consumers while protecting public health and safety
- Graduated responses depending on the incident
- Integration of food incident and public health incident response processes

Roles and Responsibilities

- Notifying Agency
- Central Notification Point
- Food Incident Contact Officer
- Lead Agency
- National Food Incident Coordinator
- Agency Food Incident Controller
- Participating Agencies
- Risk assessor
- Communications controller

How Does the Protocol Work?

Three phases:

ALERT

ACTION

STAND DOWN
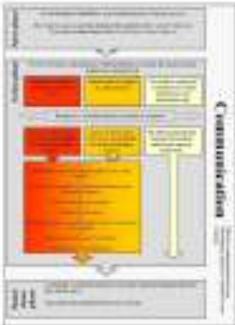
Alert Phase

- Awareness of incident from variety of sources

- Notifying agency notifies the Central Notification Point (CNP) – early notification encouraged

- CNP circulates a Food Incident Notification, including to National Incident Room (International Health Regulation obligations)

- May be only response for many incidents

Action Phase

- If more than initial info circular is required, then response moves to Action Phase.

- Actions may be restricted to the Notifying Agency or affected jurisdiction for minor incidents

- For other incidents – agencies notified of expected activities (e.g. a teleconference)

- Allocation of roles and responsibilities

- National Food Incident Coordinator

- Agency Food Incident Controllers nominated

- Lead Agency nominated

Action Phase Response Activities

- Incident Objective established

- Risk analysed and evaluated

- Consultation with industry – early as practical

- Response action to meet Incident Objective determined (e.g. recall, communication, survey)

- Best endeavours to reach an agreed response action

- Situation Reports circulated

- Implement agreed actions

- Communication activities – developed by National Food Incident Controller

- Escalation/De-escalation – participating agencies decide depending on the changing complexity of the issue

Stand-down phase

- Participating Agencies agree that a nationally coordinated response no longer required and incident deemed to be over

- Participating Agencies should do de-brief or conduct after action review

- Outcomes considered by Incident Response Working Group, who may make recommendations to ISC on changes to the Protocol

Protocol Annexes

- Intentional interference

- Chemical contaminants

- Environmental investigation/traceback

Incidents

- 2007 – 01: *Clostridium botulinum* type A, nachos
- 2007 – 02: plastic contamination, chocolate bars
- 2007 – 03: wheat gluten
- 2007 – 04: apple juice contamination
- 2007 – 05: *Listeria monocytogenes*, meat products
- 2008 – 01: cyanogenic glycosides, vegetable crackers
- 2008 – 02: metal contamination, meat and frozen products
- 2008 – 03: Melamine contaminated baby formula from China
- 2008 – 04: Dioxin contaminated pork from Ireland
- 2009 – 01: Hepatitis A in semi-dried tomatoes
- 2010 – 01: Bonsoy milk suspected link to thyroid dysfunction

**National Food
Incident Response
Protocol**

A guide for the coordination of Australian government agencies responsible for food safety and food issues in the event of a national food incident
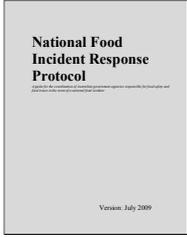
Version: July 2009

A copy of the Protocol can be accessed at:
http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/CDA339ACBEE60CF8CA257096
00193198/$File/National%20Food%20Incident%20Response%20Protocol%20-
%20July%202009.pdf

Questions?

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