Overview of Food Incidents

Steve McCutcheon

Chief Executive Officer
Food Standards Australia New Zealand
Outline

Food incidents

– What is a food safety incident?
– What is incident management?
– Why develop an incident management system?
– What are the features of such a system?

Australia’s Food Incident Response Protocol
Food Incidents
What is a food safety 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.”

(and may/will require intervention)
Common characteristics of food safety incidents

- 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 response
Response should be …

- Scientifically based
- Effective
- Consistent
- Legally sound
- Balanced – public health, social impacts, cost-benefit
- Well communicated
…but there are challenges

• New and emerging hazards
• Uncertainties in science
• Public perceptions
• Political sensitivity
• Legal issues
What is incident management?

• Measures to manage the risk to consumers from unsafe/unsuitable food in a timely and effective manner
Management Framework

A management framework must:

• Be comprehensive and address all hazards
• Be integrated at all levels of government and with industry
• Contain 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?

- Integration of activities and resources of multiple agencies
- Operationally effective for any type of incident (imminent or actual)
- Supporting principles can be applied broadly to food safety management
An Effective Management System

- Defines functions
- Uses uniform terminology
- Provides an adaptable approach
- Defines incident management structure and plans
- Clearly defines roles and responsibilities
- Allocates resources efficiently
- Adopts a risk management approach
- Establishes communication flows
- Conducts routine system reviews and modifications
- Supports training
Response Protocols

• Operation, coordination and communication between agencies/jurisdictions
• Build on existing individual organisation protocols
• Embody emergency management principles
• Define roles and responsibilities
• Describe response phases and activities
An Overview of Australia’s National Food Incident Response Protocol

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
Why have a Protocol?

- Ensures response and communication is timely, consistent, appropriate, coordinated
- Formalises current arrangements and links with Federal and State/Territory protocols
- Manages incidents for widely distributed foods
Scope

- A guidance document for coordinating the response of Australian 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 (IHR obligations)
- May be only response for many incidents
Action Phase - Set up

- 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/trace back
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: Contaminated baby formula from China
- 2008 – 04: Contaminated pork from Ireland
- 2009 – 01: Hep A linked to consumption of 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:
Thank you

Copyright

© Food Standards Australia New Zealand 2010

This work is copyright. You may download, display, print and reproduce this material in unaltered form only (retaining this notice) for your personal, non-commercial use or use within your organisation. Apart from any other use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, all other rights are reserved. Requests for further authorisation should be directed to info@foodstandards.gov.au