

Illinois Department of
**Public
Health**



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George H. Ryan, Governor • John R. Vumkoili, M.D., M.P.H., Director

525-535 West Jefferson Street • Springfield, Illinois 62761-0001

October 19, 2000

FSIS Docket Clerk
Docket #99-029P
U. S. Department of Agriculture
Food Safety and Inspection Services
Cotton Annex - Room 102
300 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250-3700

99-029P
99-029P-1
Francis C. Okino

Dear Sir:

Thank you for soliciting comments on the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) proposal to share product recall information with states and other governmental officials.

In the last year, the FSIS has tried to improve its communication with state officials by sending Recall Notification Notices to state officials via E-mails or faxes. While E-mail and fax notifications provide timely information, the fact is that the information is incomplete and does not tell the states where the adulterated or hazardous food has been distributed. In many cases, by the time the E-mails and faxes are sent out, FSIS already has all the information about the distribution of the product but chooses not to share the information with the state officials.

This is complicated by the fact that the media usually breaks the recall news before the state officials even get the E-mails or faxes. This puts state officials in an awkward position when responding to the citizens, because most consumers simply do not believe there is a recall going on and state officials do not know where the products are distributed. Consumers think state officials are lying or hiding something to protect the business involved. In short, the credibility of state officials is severely damaged by FSIS's decision to withhold this crucial food recall information from fellow regulatory officials.

It is our opinion that product recalls can be strengthened and made more effective by a collaborative effort among all affected jurisdictions. Sharing of confidential information with state officials, and their active involvement in removing defective product off the market, will result in an efficient and effective recall system that provides enhanced protection of public health.

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We are encouraged to note that FSIS is moving to involve states and change certain rules to allow for information sharing about recalls with state officials. To assure that recalled product is removed from circulation, it is critical that state officials know its distribution. State officials will, where necessary, involve local officials. Sharing recall information with state officials will not only facilitate collaboration but will also allow effective use of resources.

In closing, we want to emphasize that we understand and share FSIS's concern about release of "proprietary business information" regarding the places where the recalled food was distributed. However, in the interest of public health, we feel that state officials will exercise judicious use of such information to assure that the recalled product has been removed from the market place.

Thank you very much for giving the Illinois Department of Public Health, Division of Food, Drugs and Dairies, this opportunity to express its support for the upcoming changes that FSIS intends to make. We hope that a swift implementation of the proposal will enhance the safety and health of our citizens.

Sincerely,



Francis C. Okino, D.V.M., M.P.H., Chief
Division of Food, Drugs and Dairies

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