

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS IDENTIFYING FOOD SAFETY AND OTHER ISSUES IN AREAS AFFECTED BY NATURAL DISASTERS

Obtaining Disaster Relief

Q. Where can I, as an FSIS employee, apply to help disaster relief efforts for Katrina, Rita, and Wilma affected areas, and other natural disasters?

A. President Bush identified the American Red Cross, <http://www.redcross.org>, and the Salvation Army, <http://www.salvationarmyusa.org>, as two organizations which have mobilized in response to Hurricane Katrina. Both agencies are participating charities in the Federal government's sanctioned Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). In addition, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has posted a list of charitable organizations, <http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=18473>, accepting cash donations to help victims of hurricanes on its website. Many of these organizations identified by FEMA are also CFC participating charities.

Consumer questions regarding Food Safety and Information

Q. Were poultry and livestock affected in the aftermath of the hurricanes? Will food be safe to eat from meat and poultry that has come from affected areas? Can refrigerators and freezers be safely cleaned?

A. In 2005, hurricanes Katrina and Rita in particular, resulted in tremendous losses to the poultry and livestock industries and specifically disrupted many federally inspected poultry slaughter and processing operations along the Gulf Coast. The mission of FSIS is to protect public health by assuring that meat and poultry products that enter commerce are wholesome and safe to eat. The agency has taken steps to ensure that FSIS inspectors will be available before, during, and after the clean-up to verify that sanitary conditions are restored and that only safe and wholesome food with the mark of inspection enters the food supply. Only healthy livestock and poultry will be allowed for entry into slaughter operations when plants are able to resume slaughter and processing operations. FSIS is not aware of any processed egg operations being affected. Regardless, only meat, poultry, and processed egg operations that are able to demonstrate that sanitary conditions are capable of being maintained will be allowed to process food for distribution to consumers.

Consumers can obtain from the FSIS website <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Home/index.asp>, up-to-date information on any food safety issues, recalls, and food safety advice for consumers, and a list of steps to follow for food safety after an emergency at http://www.fsis.usda.gov/News & Events/NR_091905_01/index.asp.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/>, contains information on cleaning up your home after flooding and also describes what food to keep or throw away. Molds are a problem after extended disruption of electrical service subsequently refrigeration. Following are links to helpful websites: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/cleanup.asp>, and <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/protect.asp>.

Food Safety and Sanitation, Disposition, and Disposal of affected Product in Commercial Facilities

Q. What are the requirements for disposition and disposal of inspected product in federally inspected facilities affected by hurricanes and other natural disasters? What are the requirements for raw product in which the handling and storage facilities lost refrigeration due to power outages?

A. FSIS has taken steps to ensure that all regulatory requirements apply, and that any meat or poultry products bearing the mark of inspection entering commerce from any establishment in the hurricane area are wholesome and unadulterated. All establishments affected by the hurricane will be required to conduct a hazard analysis per 9 CFR 417.2(a) on any product or process affected by the hurricane. Any product whose process deviated from a critical limit must meet all requirements of 9 CFR 417.3. Before any operations begin, all sanitary conditions must be reestablished. The proper handling of and disposition of affected product is outlined in FSIS Regulation 9 CFR 318.14 and 9 CFR 9 CFR 381.151.

The Technical Service Center has prepared a series of **Technical Guidance Documents** which identify possible issues in establishments affected by natural disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina. These documents can be accessed at the **Interactive Knowledge Exchange (IKE)** web page, http://www.fsis.usda.gov/FSIS_Employees/IKE/index.asp#Guidance.

FSIS Inspectors will oversee and verify disposal of condemned and misbranded product. Adulterated meat, poultry, and processed egg products must be denatured and have the marks of inspection removed or destroyed under inspection supervision. This is in accordance with the regulations located in 9 CFR 314 and 9 CFR 325 for the red meat products, 9 CFR 381.95 for the poultry products, and 7 CFR 57 for processed egg products. Seafood products are not under the jurisdiction of FSIS. The Food and Drug Administration may have additional guidance regarding disposition of that product.

Water / Ice

Q: If water can be boiled to render it drinkable (potable) under the advice of the State or local Health Authority and the FDA, can it then be used in a meat, poultry, or processed egg plant to clean, make sanitizer solutions, used as a product ingredient, and for hand washing?

A: 9 CFR 416.2(g), for example, would apply in this situation. If the water meets 40 CFR 141, and the local health agency that has the authority over water finds that the water is potable by boiling, that would meet the FSIS regulation.

Labeling, Relabeling Donating Product, and Transfer of Labels

Q. What are the labeling requirements for donated product or transferring labels or packaging material from one Federally inspected establishment to another Federally inspected establishment?

A. Only inspected and passed product may carry the mark of inspection. Any donated product must be fully labeled per requirements in 9 CFR 317.2 or 9 CFR 381.129. The label must include the product name, safe handling statements for raw and partially cooked products (e.g.,

keep refrigerated), inspection legend, establishment number, net weight for retail sale products, ingredient statements, signature line, and nutrition facts (if required by regulations). In addition, such donated products should bear the statement "For Charity – Not For Sale".

If a product is being donated because the products cannot be sold in commerce for one reason or another (e. g., short-fill cans) or product is ineligible for generic label approval per 9 CFR 317.5, the Labeling and Consumer Protection Staff would need to review those labels and conditions of labeling the product that is being donated is shipped to ensure labeling integrity. As part of the application, the establishment would need to provide specific information on products that did not meet the company's quality specifications or the Federal standards and labeling requirements. For additional information, please call the Labeling and Consumer Protection at 202-205-0623.

Labels and intact packaging materials may be transferred to other Federal establishments using the guidelines in FSIS Directive 7221.1, Prior Labeling Approval, which addresses plant and inspector responsibilities under the prior label approval system implemented in July 1996, and convey the policy for the use of transferred labels. This Directive is accessed through this web link; <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FSISDirectives/7221.1.pdf> Also you can discuss this issue with the FSIS District Office.

Export Issues

Q. How do I replace lost export certificates?

A. In cases of natural disasters that destroy records or affect working space, lost export certificates will be reissued for only product certified, loaded, and shipped before the arrival of the hurricane or other natural disaster (e.g., Hurricane Katrina) and that has not arrived at the port of destination. Exporters, freight forwarders, or exporting establishments should follow FSIS Directive 9000.1 to replace lost export certificates. Exporters should coordinate requests for special assistance by working through local inspection, the District Office if available, and the Office of International Affairs at (202)-720-6400 in cases where no copy of the original certificate exists because an establishment was destroyed.