

After Action Report

Operation Badger State

FSIS-State Food Defense Partnership Exercise

August 9, 2007

Food Safety and Inspection Service

**Final Report
September 17, 2007**

Background

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is actively addressing the need to maintain the safety and defense of the country's food supply. During a crisis, it is critical that the Department be able to efficiently and effectively coordinate with its counterparts at the state and local level, as well as within other federal agencies and the private sector. On August 9, 2007, USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) conducted Operation Badger State in Madison, WI and at FSIS headquarters in Washington, DC. The Operation Badger State Exercise focused on the roles of federal, state, tribal, and local government agencies and the food industry to work together to detect, respond to, and recover from a non-routine emergency incident. Emphasis was placed on a team approach to incident response, coordination, integration of capabilities, problem identification, and resolution through preparation, response, recovery, and multi-agency coordination. The exercise offered FSIS the opportunity to test and validate operating guidelines and directives for responding to a non-routine incident involving the intentional adulteration of food products within an FSIS inspected facility. The ultimate goals were:

- Minimizing suffering, loss of life, and personal injury;
- Minimizing damage to property; and
- Minimizing disaster- or emergency-related service disruption, which would have an adverse impact on the government, the communities, and the businesses and their employees, reputation, and product brand names.

This report identifies areas of strengths and weaknesses that were observed during the exercise and offers recommendations for improvement.

Objectives

Operation Badger State focused on enhancing the coordination and communication between FSIS, other regional federal agencies, tribal nations, state and local government agencies, and industry stakeholders. The objectives for Operation Badger State were to clarify roles and responsibilities and improve coordination and communication among:

- FSIS Program Offices and associated field staffs;
- State and local public health and emergency response agencies;
- Primary Federal emergency response organizations;
- Private sector stakeholders in the food industry; and
- Tribal Nations.

Strengths of the Exercise – What Worked Well?

The exercise involved participation by the following stakeholder groups:

- FSIS field and Headquarters personnel from OFO, OPEER, OPHS, OIA, OM, OPPEP, OPAEO and OFDER
- Staff from FBI, FDA, DHS, and the USDA Office of Inspector General
- State of Wisconsin government agencies, including the Division of Public Health Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection; Wisconsin Homeland Security Council; and Wisconsin Emergency Management
- Tribal Nations, including The Oneida Nation of Wisconsin and The Ho-Chunk Nation
- Local stakeholders, including Dane County Sheriff's Office, Dane County Emergency Management, Public Health for Madison and Dane County, St. Mary's Hospital, and the University of Wisconsin
- Food industry, including Cargill, Sara Lee Corporation, Daybreak Foods/United Egg Producers, Wisconsin AgroSecurity Resource Network and Kraft Foods

Participants were actively engaged in the exercise. There was open dialogue and networking among stakeholder groups.

This exercise had the largest participation by Tribal Nation stakeholders of any FSIS-sponsored exercise to date. Tribal Nation representatives provided valuable contributions to the discussions given their unique relationships with federal, state, and local government agencies and their role as consumers of food products.

Areas for Improvement – What Did Not Work Well in the Exercise?

Exercise Structure

Several participants suggested that representation from regional EPA, state and local government environmental agencies, consumer groups, and media would have improved the exercise.

A few participants suggested that less time be allowed for discussion within stakeholder groups and more time be allowed for the debrief periods at the end of each phase. In contrast, several participants suggested that the exercise timeline be expanded to 2 days to allow for a more in-depth discussion of issues.

A number of participants commented that although the exercise scenario was realistic, the timelines were not realistic. For example, some participants commented that the information provided in the injects arrived too late in the exercise; the exercise needs a more realistic timeline with regard to how the different elements of the scenario unfold.

Communication

A Public Information Officer (PIO) participant suggested that each stakeholder group should bring their own PIO because the exercise could benefit from a communication focus and the PIOs could benefit from the exercise scenario.

Communication between local, state and federal government agencies with respect to development of public health messages needs to be improved.

Many participants noted that the exercise illustrated the need to improve communication among all stakeholder groups.

Coordination

More discussion of ICS and Unified Command and the role of local command in a Home Rule State was suggested.

A number of participants felt that an ICS structure was lacking. Coordination among federal, state, and local agencies involved in response actions needs to be improved.

Several participants suggested that communication between state and local government agencies could be improved.

Incident Command System (ICS) Issues

What triggered each stakeholder group to organize into or participate in a multi-agency incident command structure?

- Local – public health impacts caused local ICS in early phases of scenario
- State of Wisconsin –
- FSIS – severity of incident (illnesses, deaths) and surveillance video
- Industry – ICS structure was not apparent in this exercise; no EOC established

What was the effectiveness of the ICS structure for this exercise?

- Local – utilized ICS/NIMS training, but need to offer better explanation of ICS to industry
- State of Wisconsin – need better knowledge and understanding of other stakeholder groups to know when and how they can be involved to develop effective response actions
- FSIS –somewhat effective given compressed timeframe of exercise; better coordination expected in real time event
- Industry – difficult to comment on effectiveness of ICS structure

Who was in charge?

- Local – initial Incident Command was at the local level; requested more information on authorities, roles and responsibilities of federal and state agencies
- State of Wisconsin – it depends on phase of exercise
- They felt unclear about which group was in charge at different phases – because of the home rule concept, it felt like a support group. Each group did their part, but well.
- FSIS – local government initially
- Industry – FBI for criminal activity; FSIS for food safety and product recall

Were decisions coordinated among stakeholder groups?

- Local – need better communication with other stakeholders, especially industry,
- State of Wisconsin – need better coordination with private sector, since most of the infrastructure is in the private sector
- FSIS – stakeholders attempted to coordinate on decisions; more work could be done in this area
- Industry – coordination among stakeholder groups for decision making was not apparent

Other Observations

The exercise could more effectively simulate the interaction between FSIS and industry during a food product recall.

Government representatives should consult with industry to improve their understanding of the types of information industry could provide to enhance emergency response actions

FSIS should develop a better understanding of each state emergency response system prior to the exercise.

Recommendations

Consider holding the exercise in a state Emergency Operations Center.

Consider refining some injects to elicit additional discussion among participants.

Enhance the discussion of product sampling and laboratory analysis issues. Current treatment in the scenario is minimal. The identification of unknown contaminants is challenging and may take much longer than the timelines assumed in the exercise scenario.

Improve coordination and communication among all stakeholder groups. In particular, government at all levels needs to work with industry to help industry understand the ICS structure and the role of the private sector in ICS.