

An information series for Ontario food processors from the Alliance of Ontario Food Processors and The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

Recall Procedures

• To learn more about food safety contact the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs at 1-888-466-2372 ext 64752, follow the food safety links at www.omaf.gov.on.ca or email at haccp.advantage@omaf.gov.on.ca

Being Prepared

Food recalls are increasing for a variety of reasons – traceability from farm to fork; improved surveillance systems; greater consumer awareness; better detection methods; revised food safety standards; and globalized information. A comprehensive food safety program like HACCP is designed to minimize the chance of a recall happening in your facility. Should you need to recall a product, leadership and preparedness are going to be your best tools to re-gain public and customer trust.

What Is A Food Recall And Why Do They Happen?

A food recall is the process of removing a product from sale or use. A recall happens when a product may be unsafe for human consumption or may be in violation of the regulations. Examples of recalls include a product found to contain a biological hazard such as *Salmonella*, or a chemical hazard such as undeclared allergens, or a physical hazard such as metal fragments.

If your company has made a product that may be unsafe or may not be in compliance with the regulations and you have sold the product to someone else, you must recall the product. The Federal Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has the authority to order a recall if you do not do so voluntarily, as does the Medical Officer of Health.

Recalls fall into 3 classes. It is the responsibility of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), to assign the classification.

Class I: A situation in which there is a reasonable probability that the use of, or exposure to the product will cause serious adverse health consequences or death. A *public alert is usually issued*.

Class II: A situation in which the use of, or exposure to the product may cause temporary adverse health consequences or where the probability of serious adverse health consequences is remote. A *public alert may be issued*.

Class III: A situation in which the use of, or exposure to the product is not likely to cause any adverse health consequences. A *public alert is not generally issued*.

How Do You Know If You Need To Do A Recall?

Recalls are triggered in many different ways and your company must pay attention to the products and processes used in your operations so that you are aware of when a recall may be necessary. In addition to recalls initiated by your company, other ways that recalls may be triggered include – consumer or customer complaints; competitor complaints; media information; the internet; routine monitoring, inspection and analysis; and, plant inspections.

Would You Be Ready For A Recall?

Despite best efforts by food processors to ensure the products they process are safe, sometimes, for a variety of reasons, a recall is necessary. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has identified the following questions to ask yourself to determine if your company would be ready:

- If you needed to remove a product from the market right now, would you be able to?
- Would you be able to remove the product quickly?
- Would you be able to remove all of the product?

Information Required In The Event Of A Recall

The CFIA has developed a list of the information required in the event of a recall:

A detailed description of the nature of the problem

The name, brand, size, lot code(s) affected

Details of complaints received and any reported illnesses

The distribution of the product – local or national

When the product was distributed (specific dates)

Label(s) of the product(s) which may be recalled

The total quantity of product imported and distributed

The name of your firm's contact with the CFIA

The name and telephone number(s) for your firm's after-hours contact

The number for the Ontario recall contact at CFIA is 416-973-8724.

If your supplier advised you that an ingredient or package they have sold to you is unsafe, and you have used the ingredient or package to make a product, would you be able to identify that product(s) and remove it from the market?

Having a Recall Plan in place will assist your company should a recall be necessary.

Where To Start

The main objectives of any recall are to:

- contain the problem so that no one becomes ill
- preserve confidence in your company and its products; and
- correct the problem so that it does not reoccur.

The best way to meet these objects is to prepare a Recall Plan for your facility. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has developed a Guide to assist food processors in developing a Recall Plan which is included on their web-site at www.inspection.gc.ca. Once you are into the web-site choose 'Office of Food Safety and Recalls' from the left-hand side bar. From there choose 'Recall Plans' and then 'Manufacturer's Guide'. There are ten basic elements as part of the Recall Plan that are outlined in detail on the web-site. The ten elements include:

- Recall Management Team
- Complaint File
- Recall Contact List
- Tracing of Raw Ingredients, Packaging Materials and Finished Products
- Production Amounts
- Distribution Records
- Recalled Product Records
- Recall Procedures
- Recall Effectiveness Procedures
- Testing Your Recall Plan

What To Do If A Recall Is Necessary

In the event of a food safety problem, you need to take immediate action. Once again, the CFIA web-site noted above provides direction to assist food processors in undertaking the necessary steps. Details are provided for the following elements to be met in the event your company must do a recall:

- Assemble Your Recall Management Team
- Notify the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (see side panel on this page for information you will need to provide to the CFIA)
- Identify All Products to be Recalled
- Detain and Segregate Products to be Recalled
- Prepare a Press Release (if required)
- Prepare the Distribution List
- Prepare and Distribute the Notice of Recall
- Verify the Effectiveness of the Recall
- Control of the Recalled Product
- Decide What to do with the Returned Product
- Fix the Cause of the Recall