

Consumer Complaint Monitoring System USDA

Presentation for the Public Meeting on Foreign Material
Contamination
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FSIS' Role in Protecting the Nation's Food Supply

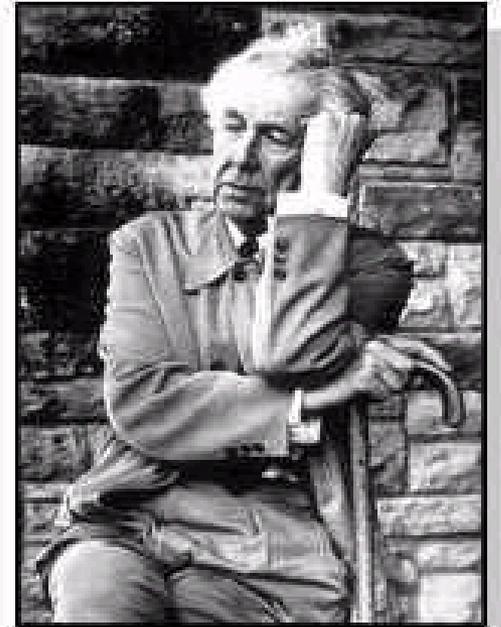
- 1906 Federal Meat Inspection
- 1957 Poultry Inspection Programs
- 1967-68 Wholesome Meat and Poultry Act
- 1995 Egg Products
- 1996 Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP)





Consumer's Voice

- 1999 OIG reviewed HACCP activities
- Food Safety Initiative
- Handling of consumer complaints



Consumer Complaints

FSIS uses consumer complaints to help identify unsafe meat, poultry, and egg products in commerce that may have to be removed from commerce.



Purpose:

Consumer Complaint Monitoring System (CCMS) is a passive surveillance system designed to document and track all consumer complaints that are reported to the Food Safety and Inspection Service.



Definition of a Consumer Complaint

- Any complaint reported to FSIS that is initiated by a consumer, or on behalf of a consumer, that is related to an FSIS-inspected product
- Complaints are *alleged* by consumer
- Not possible to verify all complaints



Intake Areas

- **USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline**
- **Compliance and Investigation Division**
- **District Offices**
- **Office of Public Health and Science (OPHS)**
- **Labeling and Food Protection**
- **State or Local Health Departments**
- **Other Federal Agencies**



Examples of Complaints

- **Complaints associated with consumption of a meat, poultry or egg product that allege:**
 - ◆ an illness
 - ◆ an injury
 - ◆ foreign object/material
 - ◆ an allergic reaction
 - ◆ underprocessing of a ready-to-eat (RTE) product
 - ◆ misbranding
 - ◆ economic adulteration
 - ◆ inferior quality



Examples Not Entered as Consumer Complaints

- **School lunch program complaints**
- **Industry complaints not initiated by a consumer**
- **Retail-prepared product**
- **Product tampering/ bioterrorism**



Screening Consumer Complaints

- **Determine if complaint meets criteria for inclusion**
- **If so, database search for similar cases**
- **Determine if further investigation warranted**



Non-investigated Cases

- Letter to consumer with cc to ADME of complainant district
- Letter to establishment of concern with cc to ADME of establishment district



Investigated Cases

- **Warranted for:**
 - ◆ **ONE complaint of underprocessing of an RTE product**
 - ◆ **ONE lab confirmed illness/injury**
 - ◆ **ONE allergen complaint**
 - ◆ **TWO or more foreign material complaints**
 - ◆ **TWO or more of quality, economic adulteration, etc...**
 - ◆ **Misbranding**



Investigated Cases (Procedure)

- **ADME of complainant district notified**
- **Compliance Officer (CO) will initiate investigation**
- **CO will verify info and collect samples, if necessary**
- **Laboratory testing, if necessary**
- **ADME of establishment district notified as needed, who will contact and involve the IIC (Inspector-in-Charge), when needed**
- **All information documented and flows through CCMS**
- **Potential recall handled by RMD**



Investigated Cases cont.

- Letter to consumer with cc to ADME complainant district
- Letter to District Manager of establishment district
 - ◆ When necessary, they follow up with establishment (HACCP and SSOP, etc., evaluated)



Establishment follow-up

- **At times an establishment will have numerous complaints, but not all about the same product, or not about the same problem with the same product**
- **Therefore, according to our SOPs we do not initiate an investigation**
- **We ask the ADME to follow up with the IIC in the plant to evaluate plant processing.**

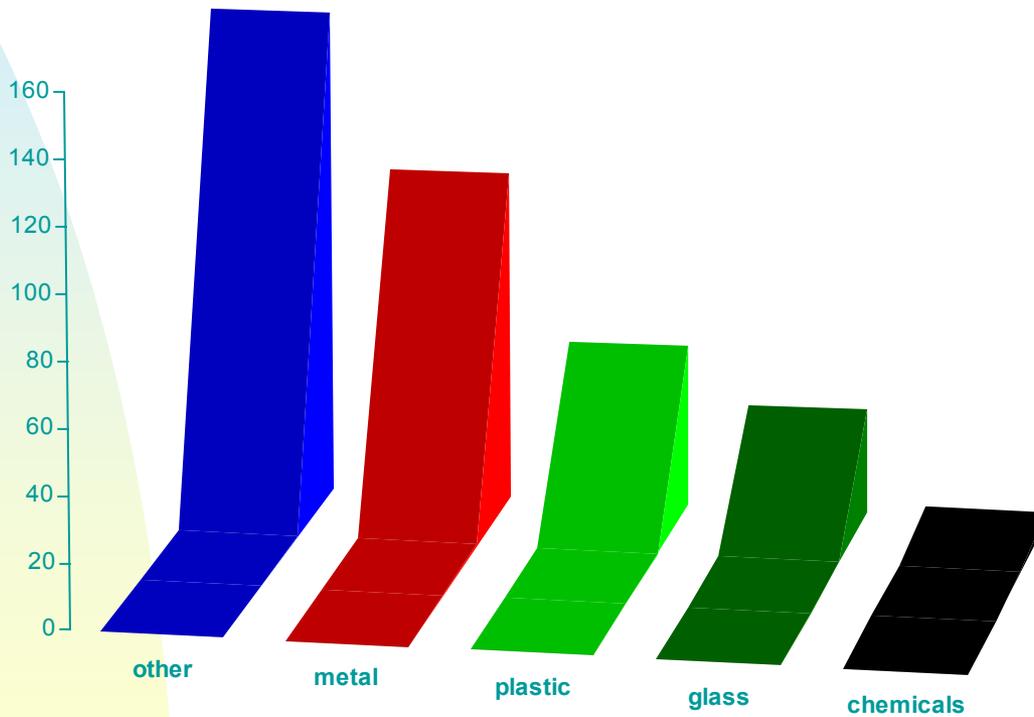


What has CCMS found ?

- **N= 1309 from 01/01/02 to 09/13/02**
- **Foreign material (FM) complaints = 331**
 - ◆ 25% of all CCMS complaints
 - ◆ injury n = 20 or 6%
 - ◆ illness n = 24 or 7%



Breakdown of foreign materials (n = 331)



Glass n = 32

- 10% of foreign material complaints
- Allegedly resulted in 4 injuries (12%) and 2 illnesses (6%)



Metal n = 100

- Represents 30% of foreign material consumer complaints
- 5% allegedly resulting in injury
- Lacerations to tissues of mouth, gums, and throat
- Multiple broken teeth



Plastic n = 32

- Represents 15% of foreign material complaints
- 4% allegedly resulted in illness, one case requiring surgical intervention
- 10% allegedly resulted in injury/choking
- Special concern is for young children



Chemicals n = 3

- To date, these complaints in CCMS resulted in no injury or illness
- Complainants identified through smell, taste, and sight



Other n = 147

- Consists primarily of wood, fingernails, and stones
- Represents 44% of foreign material complaints
- 4% allegedly resulted in injury (wood=lacerations, stones=dental)
- 12% allegedly resulted in illness (most not lab confirmed)



Hamilton and Polter 1989 Hyman 1993

5% of foreign material in
food results in minor to
serious injury



Case Summary

- Hotline received two complaints about Italian sausage with extraneous material
- Sharp slivers of shiny plastic one measuring 1" x 1/16" x 1/16"
- Identically coded product from the same store



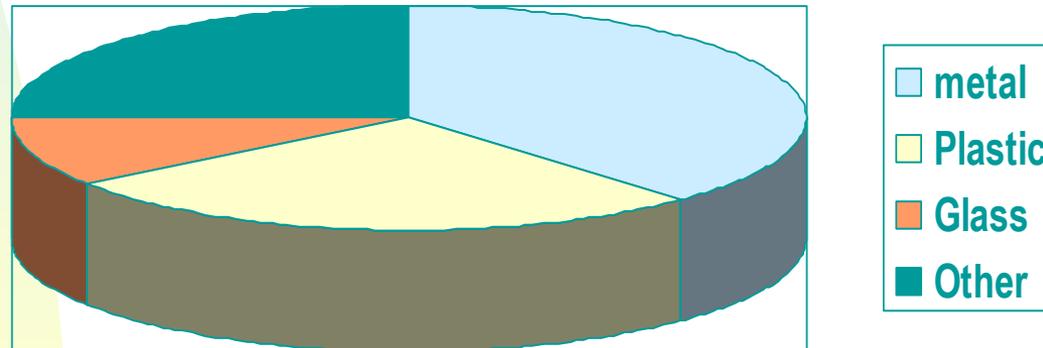
Case Summary

- Alleged consumption produced Heme positive stools in a small child
- Laceration to roof of pets mouth
- IIC notified, HAACP plan reviewed
- Health Hazard Evaluation Board
- Resulted in Class 1 recall with press release



Recalls Related to Foreign Material

1982-Present n = 122



Conclusions

CCMS is one of FSIS' tools used to help assure a safe food supply

- Consumer complaints provide early warning to possible hazards
- Number of reports as a percentage of true incidence is possibly low; consumers are not solicited
- Data from CCMS suggests minor to severe injuries have resulted from foreign material in 6% of cases

