

AFTER ACTION REPORT

**OPERATION GOLDEN STATE
JANUARY 19, 2006**

FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE

**FINAL REPORT
FEBRUARY 28, 2006**

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 January 19, 2006, USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) conducted Operation Golden State in Alameda County, California and at FSIS headquarters in Washington DC. The Operation Golden State Exercise focused on the roles of Federal, state 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
- Minimizing disaster or emergency-related service disruption, which would have an adverse impact on the government, the communities, businesses and their employees, reputation, and product brand names.

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

Objectives

Operation Golden State focused on enhancing the coordination and communication between FSIS, other regional Federal agencies, state and local government agencies, and industry stakeholders. The objectives for Operation Golden 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

Strengths of the Exercise – What Worked Well?

The exercise involved strong participation by the following stakeholder groups:

- FSIS field and Headquarters personnel from OFO, OPEER, OPHS, OIA, OPPED, and OFDER
- Regional staff from FDA, Coast Guard, EPA, FBI, and the USDA Office of Inspector General
- State of California staff from the Office of Homeland Security, Department of Health Services, and Department of Food and Agriculture,
- Alameda City and County staff from the Alameda Police Department, county Public Health Department, County Environmental Health, and Homeland Security/Office of Emergency Services
- Meat industry, including the American Meat Institute, National Meat Association, and Costco Wholesale Meats

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

Local public health agencies worked closely with state agencies.

The stakeholders generally agreed that the portion of the exercise scenario dealing with the collection and disposal of adulterated food products provided an opportunity for discussion of potential response actions that are not often addressed.

This food defense exercise provided an opportunity for local emergency response agencies to test their preparedness for a type of emergency incident not previously tested.

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

Communication between FSIS Alameda District Office and FSIS Headquarters was problematic because of telecommunication equipment limitations.

The exercise Situation Manual generally was not used by the participants.

Not enough time was allocated for Hot Wash discussions.

There was some concern expressed about the realism and timeline of the exercise scenario and injects. For example, state representatives expressed concern about why industry and FSIS did not begin a food product recall after Phase 1. Industry representatives indicated that product distribution information would be available earlier in the exercise.

Press Release Issues

- The State Public Health Officer decided to issue a press release/bulletin to all citizens of California warning about the consumption of ground beef based upon the concern that FSIS was not acting quickly enough to protect public health by working with industry to announce a food product recall.
- There appeared to be confusion among FSIS Program Offices (OPAEO and OFO) about FSIS' agreement with wording of this press release, and whether it was a joint press release with the state.
- Industry representatives expressed concern about the disconnect between this type of press release and the more focused type of food product recalls typically developed working with FSIS.
- County government representatives requested local involvement in the development and distribution of public health bulletins and press releases because local hospitals are typically the first institutions to be impacted by such notifications.

Product Recall and Disposal Issues

Although product recall, collection and disposal were discussed, there did not appear to be agreement about how to effectively address these issues, including which agencies should provide information to industry and multi-agency command structures about potential disposal actions for contaminated product, decontamination actions for processing and retail facilities, collection of products from consumers, measurement of the effectiveness of product recalls, and press releases.

Incident Command System (ICS) Issues

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

- Local/County – Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activated based upon overwhelming requests for information from state
- State – State Operations Center (SOC) activated upon EOC action by local government
- FSIS – FSIS ICS structure activated upon recommendation of the FSIS EMC and in response to actions by local government
- Industry – at first not asked to participate in the EOC or SOC. However, industry representatives stated that they would align themselves with FSIS as subject matter experts

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

- There appeared to be gaps in coordination between the local EOC and the state SOC.
- Industry requested clarification regarding which agency is in charge (i.e., transition from local to state to Federal) and what the triggers are.
- The Other Federal Agency table also asked for clarification of the roles of the state SOC.
- Industry cited their existing relationship with FSIS and stated that they would align with FSIS as subject matter experts

Who was in charge?

- There was some confusion about who was in charge at different phases in the exercise.
- Initial Incident Command was at the local level.
- The state appeared to assume command once the SOC was formed.
- The state assumed that FBI would take charge, but the FBI representative made it clear that FBI would only assume the lead for the criminal investigation of the incident, not public health protection.
- Within the FSIS ICS, there appeared to be some confusion about the roles of the local IC versus those of FSIS staff at Headquarters.

Were decisions coordinated among stakeholder groups?

- There was an attempt to coordinate decisions among stakeholder groups (e.g., press releases, product disposal recommendations), but there were some problems experienced in execution, given the contracted timeframe of the exercise.

Recommendations

There should be more coordination and action accountability among Federal, state and local government agencies to minimize confusion about who is in charge of multi-agency command at various points in the exercise scenario. Multi-agency communication protocols should be reviewed.

FSIS should evaluate its ICS structure and determine the roles that various stakeholder groups (e.g., local and state government agencies, industry, consumer groups, and political officials) play in interacting with FSIS in response to non-routine incidents.

Better communication among stakeholder groups is needed. Regular meetings to update partners on issues should also be considered.

Government at all levels needs to work with industry on response actions.

There is a need for better coordination in the development of press releases – participants should clarify responsibilities of stakeholder groups.

Federal and state laboratories and FERN should have more integral roles in future exercises.

Stakeholder groups should recognize the importance of having PIOs participate at the session.

Disposal and decontamination planning and communication among the various stakeholder groups should be an area of future focus.