

After Action Report

Operation Chesapeake Bay

FSIS-State Food Defense Partnership Exercise

October 4, 2007

Food Safety and Inspection Service

**Final Report
October 29, 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 October 4, 2007, USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) conducted Operation Chesapeake Bay at George Mason University in Arlington, VA. The Operation Chesapeake Bay Exercise focused on the roles of federal, state, tribal, and local government agencies, consumer groups 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 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 Chesapeake Bay focused on enhancing the coordination and communication among FSIS, other regional federal agencies, consumers, state and local government agencies, and industry stakeholders. The objectives for Operation Chesapeake Bay 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;
- Consumer groups; 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, OPPEO and OFDER
- Staff from FBI, FDA, EPA, DHS, Indian Health Service, Senator Richard Burr's Office (NC), the USDA Office of Inspector General and the USDA Homeland Security Office
- State of Maryland government agencies- the Maryland Department of Health & Mental Hygiene (including the Food Control Division and the Office of Preparedness and Response) and the Maryland Department of Agriculture
- Local stakeholders, including Prince George's County Food Safety Division (Department of Health), Prince George's County Department of Environment - Waste Management Division, and the District of Columbia's Department of Health
- Food industry, including Costco Wholesale Corporation and the American Meat Institute
- Representatives from the Center for Science in the Public Interest and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials.

Communications and Coordination

Participants were actively engaged in the exercise. There was extensive communication and networking among the stakeholder groups. Prince George's County, the District of Columbia, and the State of Maryland immediately began sharing information and working together. The State of Maryland created a Joint Information Center (JIC) so that they would be speaking with one consistent message to the public.

FSIS worked effectively with industry, other Federal agencies, consumers and state/local representatives. The Beltsville District Office proactively sought out information from the various stakeholders while sharing updates on their actions and the status of the investigation.

Industry and the FBI worked together to gather information on the suspect. Industry also implemented their Crisis Management Plan in consultation with law enforcement.

The other Federal agencies also worked together identifying roles and responsibilities while taking care to "stay in their lanes". The various agencies gave and took advice willingly. For example, EPA raised the issue of worker/first responder protection from the contaminant as an inhalant, and Maryland altered their crisis response plans in reaction to the information.

Communication Reminders

Participants overwhelmingly appreciated the role of the Communication Reminders, finding them to be helpful, informative, and timely.

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

Coordination

Consumer representatives felt that they were not included in discussions and that information was not readily shared with them. They had many questions about distribution of product that went unanswered and at times felt they received conflicting information, particularly with regard to the handling and disposition of the contaminated product.

Government Agency Guidance

Local governments were not aware of the procedures for returning contaminated product and were unsure as to which organization (EPA, USDA or industry) would provide guidance. There were also extensive discussions among industry, FSIS, and EPA regarding the need to treat the entire returned product as hazardous waste.

Exercise Structure

Several participants suggested that the exercise could be improved by greater participation by local law enforcement and representatives for Maryland's Department of the Environment and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Other participants suggested that injects be created for Tribal Nations. Also, some participants recommended that the law enforcement/criminal activity component of the exercise should be brought to closure.

One person suggested that a communications timeline be generated during the exercise to illustrate gaps.

Incident Command System (ICS) Issues

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

- State and Local – public health impacts caused local ICS in early phases of scenario
- FSIS – severity of incident (illnesses, deaths) and surveillance video
- Industry – ICS seemed disjointed and not well coordinated, “we wait to be asked to participate”

- Consumers – echoed Industry’s concerns and felt that they were not included
- Other Federal agencies – determined by the role of the agency (i.e. regulatory role versus investigating a criminal incident)

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

- State and Local – ICS allows for a network to be established, every emergency starts off as a local emergency.
- FSIS – ICS allows for discipline, decisions became better coordinated as the day progressed
- Consumer – ICS allows for one source of information rather than disparate messages from a variety of stakeholders
- Industry – echoed the Consumers statements regarding ICS
- Other Federal agencies – ICS makes it possible to define roles and responsibilities during a crisis

Who was in charge?

- State and Local – initially Prince George’s County representatives were in charge but this evolved as the severity of the incident grew
- Consumers – expressed some confusion about who was in charge and their best source for information
- FSIS – local government initially
- Industry – FBI for criminal activity; FSIS for food safety and product recall

Were decisions coordinated among stakeholder groups?

- State and Local – need better communication with other stakeholders, especially consumers
- FSIS – stakeholders attempted to coordinate on decisions but more work could be done in this area
- Industry – there seemed to be little coordination initially but as the exercise progressed stakeholders were more proactive in reaching out to other groups

Recommendations

- Work with the CDC to identify a participant for the next exercise.
- Consider creating an inject detailing the apprehension of the suspect.
- [Develop injects for tribal nations and use as appropriate](#)
- Encourage participants to include more junior players in future exercises to train up-and-coming staff in ICS and emergency response procedures.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities of industry and government regarding product recall and disposal of product.