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## Tell Us Your FSIS Stories and Snapshots!

Send articles and photos to [Beacon@usda.gov](mailto:Beacon@usda.gov). Articles must be original works that have been cleared by your supervisor and contain the author's name and contact information. Submissions should not exceed 250 words. *The Beacon* editorial staff will edit submissions for content and length.

High-resolution photos must be submitted as a separate attachment in .jpg format. Provide a media release form for photos of individuals under 18 years of age.

# The Beacon

## PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH THROUGH FOOD SAFETY

June 2020

FSIS will continue to publish *The Beacon* according to our regular schedule. Employees should continue to participate in all-employee town hall calls, and look for timely information from their supervisors and the Wednesday Newslines.



Photo by Joe Abbott, OM.

On June 16, Office of Food Safety Under Secretary Dr. Mindy Brashears and FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker visited four poultry plants in Maryland and Delaware to support the field during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pictured left, Dr. Brashears thanks the P-667 inspection team in Selbyville, Delaware, for their dedication to the FSIS mission and discusses the use of protective equipment during the pandemic, such as face coverings and face shields provided to in-plant personnel. Seated (from left): Consumer Safety Inspectors (CSI) Felicia Derrickson and Alexandria Kitchens; standing (from left) Dr. Brashears, Frontline Supervisor Dr. Lindsey Ewing, CSI Robert Moore Jr., and Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian Dr. Rallene Glascoe.

## Stay Up-to-Date on COVID-19 Issues

By Laura Reiser, OPACE  
Phone: (202) 720-7894

During the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals, industries and government agencies are working to keep up with the new and changing information about the situation. It's not just about receiving the information, but delivering it to others — consumers, patients, businesses and critical infrastructure workers like you.

New and updated information and guidance continues to come to the Agency rapidly. Considerable communication efforts ensure that the Agency delivers the information to you as quickly as possible. Watch for these opportunities. Town hall meetings continue every Wednesday with an average of 1,570 participants per week. As new issues arise and situations evolve, employees are emailing questions, concerns, and suggestions to the FSIS Feedback email box, [FSISfeedback@usda.gov](mailto:FSISfeedback@usda.gov). In fact, from mid-March to June 15, employees have emailed more than 800 messages to the feedback email box. FSIS

user notices are distributed as quickly as possible when new information is available, highlighted in the town hall meetings and posted at the FSIS employee information webpage, [www.fsis.usda.gov/employees](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/employees). Because that page is on the public-facing website, no eAuthentication or other login is required. The April and May issues of *The Beacon* provided answers to frequently asked questions. Below, are more questions and answers, updates and important reminders. Thank you for continuing to ask questions, raise concerns and provide suggestions.

### Return-to-Work Plan

Question: A CSI from the Alameda District asks, "The USDA Reopening Playbook states that employees can continue to receive weather and safety leave through Phase 2. If a field employee provides medical documentation demonstrating they are at higher risk for severe outcomes from COVID-19, will we be granted weather and safety leave also?"

Continued on page 10...



# The Beacon

PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH THROUGH FOOD SAFETY

## The Beacon Mission Statement

The Beacon newsletter is prepared by the Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education to provide relevant mission critical information to all FSIS employees.

The Beacon provides employees information about the Agency's proposed regulations, policies and programs; training opportunities; and important employee welfare initiatives to connect employees to the mission and build a cohesive community.

The Beacon enables employees to stay up-to-date with the latest events and see the Agency's mission executed in action.

## Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education

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Megan Traylor

Deadline for submissions is the first day of the previous month.

Aug. issue – due Jul. 1

Sep. issue – due Aug. 1

Oct. issue – due Sep. 1

Nov. issue – due Oct. 1

Articles will be considered for publication in the order in which they are received. If your article is time sensitive, please indicate that in the subject line of your submission email. Due to the number of submissions received each month and the limited amount of space, we unfortunately cannot guarantee that your submission will be used.

## The FSIS Management Council

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# New FSIS Website Coming Soon

By Laura Scott, OPACE

Phone: (202) 494-1927

In the coming months, FSIS will roll out a redesign of the Agency's public-facing website. The website will include a new look and feel, new features, improved usability and a mobile-friendly design. Most importantly, the redesigned menu options will make it easier for users to find valuable information on food safety, science and data, policy and inspection.

The design will follow branding and style guidelines from the Department while catering to FSIS topics and customer needs.

After gathering feedback from stakeholders and employees from across the Agency, the new website features will include a robust search function and a notification bar for news alerts. The alerts feature will appear on all pages of the website to make users aware of timely news items including recalls, public health alerts and press releases. By having the alert appear on every page, users of the website will be informed of any food safety or public health alerts no matter which page of the site they visit.

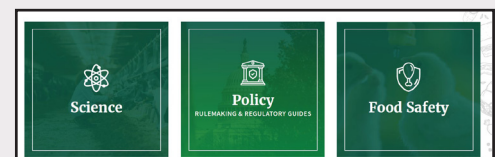
The website will continue to direct users to customer service programs including askFSIS, Ask USDA, the Meat and Poultry Hotline and reporting problems with food.

The new website is expected to launch later this Fall and will replace the current site at [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov). Every effort will be made to redirect website users from old links or bookmarks to new pages in the site.

FSIS subject matter experts and content contributors can continue to request website content updates through the Digital and Executive Communications Staff by emailing [opace/wdcs@usda.gov](mailto:opace/wdcs@usda.gov). During the last week of June, employees will be able to preview portions of the new site during virtual open houses. More information about how to participate in the open houses will be in the *Wednesday Newsline*.



Pictured left and below are components from the website redesign.



## Under Secretary's Column

Most consumers haven't had the opportunity to see the daily commitment and contribution that FSIS employees make to the public's health and well-being through food safety. They may not understand the integral role of our inspectors in the Nation's meat and poultry processing facilities and the continuity of our food supply chain. Our employees are on the front line of America's critical infrastructure, and, as essential workers, need adequate supplies to effectively perform their jobs.



**Dr. Mindy Brashears**

FSIS is diligently working to protect and care for our employees, shifting priorities quickly to ensure that people have the information and equipment necessary to do their jobs safely. There have been challenges along the way, and in many cases, changes to our work environments. It has been inspiring to see all of you rise to meet those challenges, adapting and evolving as needed, and continuing to carry out our vital mission.

Employee health and safety for plant employees is not with the jurisdiction of FSIS or USDA. The Department will continue to work with USDA-regulated establishments, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state, tribal and local officials to ensure facilities are implementing practices consistent with the guidance to keep employees safe and continue operations. USDA is partnering with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and CDC as they have the authority and expertise over employee health and worker safety issues for plant employees.

Thank you for all your hard work and sacrifice the last few months. FSIS will continue to keep as its number one priority the health and safety of its employees as we fulfill our mission of ensuring the safety of the Nation's commercial supply of meat, poultry and processed egg products.

## Administrator's Column

Even with the attention that COVID-19 has demanded over the last four months, the Agency has continued to make progress on our modernization goals. Many FSIS-regulated establishments are also moving forward with their own plans for modernization, including conversions



**Paul Kiecker**

to the New Poultry or New Swine Inspection systems. If you work in an establishment that may convert to a new inspection system, and you are in a position that could be affected by conversion, I encourage you to think about what types of options you would like to pursue.

I want to make sure all in-plant personnel are aware of the FSIS Continuing Education Program (CEP). Since 2017, the CEP has been available to permanent full-time food inspectors and non-supervisory consumer safety inspectors who are in good standing and have worked for FSIS for a minimum of one year. CEP will reimburse up to \$3,000 per year for approved undergraduate college-level courses related to food safety, food science and animal or meat sciences taken on an employees' own time. Since CEP began, approximately 300 employees have taken advantage of this opportunity to expand their knowledge of food safety and science — some have even earned certificates or degrees or qualified for a job promotion.

An FSIS CEP program is also available to in-plant public health veterinarians and supervisory public health veterinarians in the Office of Field Operations. These positions are eligible for up to \$500 reimbursement per year to attend professional meetings, conferences, webinars and courses to earn Continuing Education (CE) credits. These credits help FSIS veterinarians meet CE requirements for veterinary licenses and keep our workforce up to date and engaged in lifelong learning.

COVID-19 will likely continue to present challenges for us as we continue to move forward. But, as we adapt to the changing situation, we must not lose sight of our goals, opportunities that arise along the way or new ways we can keep carrying out our critical food safety mission.



# FACES OF FOOD SAFETY

## Dr. Khali Jones is Living Her Dream

By Suzanne Hensell, OPACE  
Phone: (202) 690-3626

Since the age of six, Dr. Khali Jones dreamed of being a veterinarian. Now, as a relief supervisory public health veterinarian (SPHV) in the Atlanta District, Jones is living her dream. After serving with FSIS as a student veterinary trainee during her last two years at Tuskegee University College of Veterinary Medicine, she joined FSIS full time in August 2019.

### SPHV Duties

The past nine months have been busy for Jones. She travels weekly to establishments throughout her circuit to perform antemortem and postmortem inspection, verify humane handling of birds through good commercial practices, determine dispositions on abnormal carcasses (such as any with infectious diseases, neoplasms and contamination), verify sanitary conditions in establishments, and authorize export documentation that allows products to be shipped internationally. Said Jones, "During my time as an SPHV, I have already composed noncompliance records, performed mid-year progress reviews for inspectors I supervise, completed National Antimicrobial Resistance Monitoring System samples and assisted with training a new supervisory consumer safety inspector in our circuit."

Jones enjoys learning and is motivated to be successful in protecting public health through training, whether on the job or online via AgLearn. She continually seeks opportunities to learn, grow and develop professionally. Jones' supervisor, Dr. Marina Tutt, said, "Dr. Jones is the type of veterinarian who can and will sustain the high standards that the Agency needs."

### No "Typical" Workday

Jones finds the work rewarding because she can interact with new establishments, new employees and new environments every week as she travels. "I am proud to bring diversity to the profession and serve as a role model for a new generation of federal veterinarians," she said. As a relief SPHV, there is no "typical" day; her schedule can vary weekly and she may be working first, second or third shift at a traditional plant or an NPIS establishment. One week, she may report to a plant at 4:00 a.m., where she ensures that inspectors report to their stations in a timely manner and perform good commercial practices tasks for poultry; she also covers during online inspectors' breaks, visually inspecting carcasses on the line. In another week, she may report to a different plant at 2:30 p.m., where she may have to handle sanitation issues on the processing floor, attend a weekly meeting with establishment management and spend half of her work hours completing export documentation from five different cold storage facilities ready to ship products internationally. If a veterinarian at her home plant is absent from work, she may arrive at 8:30 p.m. to ensure there is adequate coverage. During the 'graveyard' shift,



Dr. Jones with her dog, Styx, whom she adopted from the Atlanta Humane Society.

she finds it quiet and a good time to catch up on emails, perform periodic walk-throughs of the plant and determine a disposition on a carcass if needed by her inspectors. Said Jones, "Some days can be stressful and overwhelming with multiple things occurring simultaneously; nevertheless, I always try to stay focused, keep a smile on my face and work with a positive attitude."

Depending on which shift and location she is working, Jones supervises approximately 16 food inspectors and 30 consumer safety inspectors. She describes her coworkers as "hard-working, motivated and competent." Jones believes "teamwork is the glue that holds our agency together! In the plant, all USDA personnel work towards our mission in their daily tasks; teamwork fosters a positive and productive environment." Through her PHV network, Jones can always share and ask for feedback on questions and concerns.

### Path to FSIS

As an undergraduate at Tuskegee University, Jones majored in Animal Sciences, in which she earned bachelor's and master's degrees. She continued her education at Tuskegee University College of Veterinary Medicine, where she obtained her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine in May 2019. She was recognized for her leadership and academic excellence with the Merck Academic Excellence Award and the Christian Veterinary Fellowship Leadership Award.

Jones first learned about FSIS through an email blast sent to students in her veterinary school; it encouraged students to apply for a new scholarship opportunity with the Agency. In 2017, she received the Adel A. Malak Scholarship and completed the Pathways internship where she gained early exposure into her career. She received mentorship, professional development and hands-on experience in the poultry and meat industries, which helped prepare her for her future role as an SPHV. She decided to apply for a position with the Agency because it combined her passions for veterinary medicine, public health and pathology.

*Continued on page 5...*

# Recent FSIS Retirees

Thank you for your service and dedication to public health.

Name/Position	Duty Station	Years of Service	Name/Position	Duty Station	Years of Service
Bearden, Linda D., FI-S	Ellijay, Ga.	21	Keyes Jr., John L., CSI	Decatur, Ala.	43
Beavers, Kenneth, FI-S	Gadsden, Ala.	20	Peterson, Norman W., CSI	Long Prairie, Minn.	8
Benson, Lonnie D., CSI	Madison, Neb.	31	Prescott, Kenneth L., CSI	Wichita, Kan.	33
Collins, George D., CSI	Green Forest, Ark.	33	Quinn, Maritza I., Supv. Chemist	Athens, Ga.	33
Coulter, James R., Compliance Spec.	Washington, D.C.	20	Rigli, Glen A., FI-S	Gadsden, Ala.	42
Daberkow, Mark E., CSI	Fremont, Neb.	30	Robinson, Mearl R., CSI	Nashville, Ala.	31
Grant, Anna J., FI-S	Center, Texas	20	Thomas, Julia H., CSI	Carrollton, Fla.	32
Hamada, Stacey A., CSI	Honolulu, Hawaii	22	Triplett, Joey D., FI-S	Morganton, N.Y.	16
Hastings, Richard D., FI-S	Wallula, Wash.	17	Wabeke, Jerry D., FI	Sweet Grass, Mont.	32
Hopke, Paul J., CSI	Bowling Green, Mo.	34	Wolf, Jack M., CSI	Hope, Ala.	31
Kelley, Bonnie J., FI-S	Jack, Ala.	28			

...Continued from page 4

*Faces of Food Safety*

Her mentors — all SPHVs — included Dr. Lavell Galloway and Dr. Rodney Prince (coincidentally, Tuskegee grads like Jones) as well as Dr. Wes Tillison. They taught her about the importance of documentation, and not only how to be an effective supervisor

but also how to handle various issues within an establishment.



Dr. Jones, Relief SPHV, completes antemortem inspection to ensure birds are free of disease conditions at P-6505 in Claxton, Georgia. Photo courtesy of Andrew Gordon, OFO.

## Off Duty

Jones' friends agree that safe food equals a healthier life, but most are surprised to learn that veterinarians work in the food industry. She said,

"They never really made the connection of veterinarians to animals such as cattle, swine and poultry that produce the food products fit for human consumption. When shopping with my grandmother,

she is always amazed when I identify a tray of chicken wings that has come from an establishment where I have worked."

Since 2014, Jones has volunteered with the USDA Child Nutrition Program through the Georgia Food Bank Association. The 8-week summer feeding program hosted by her home church serves local children, ages 5-18. Said Jones, "I help with the daily preparation of breakfast and lunch meals. There is a critical need to ensure children have well balanced meals as many of the disadvantaged youth would not have access to food without this resource."

When she's not working at various establishments in the Atlanta District, Jones enjoys playing tennis, reading, writing, dancing, traveling, volunteering and spending time with family, friends and her dog, Styx.

## Reminder to Protect Personally Identifiable Information (PII)

In response to the national emergency related to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), FSIS reminds employees of their duty to continue to protect personally identifiable information (PII) while teleworking. PII is information about an individual maintained by an agency, including any information that can be used to distinguish or trace an individual's identity. On March 31, FSIS released a set of guidelines to help employees proactively protect PII and how to report PII incidents (the unintentional or intentional loss of information; or unauthorized access, acquisition, modification or disclosure of PII information whether physical or electronic). Please take time to review the documents. It is up to each of us to ensure the safety and integrity of the agency's mission. If you have any questions regarding the guidelines, email the Privacy mailbox at [USDAPrivacy@ocio.usda.gov](mailto:USDAPrivacy@ocio.usda.gov).

# REMEMBERING THEIR SACRIFICE: JEAN HILLERY, TOM QUADROS AND BILL SHALINE

By Sara Baucher, Will Gillingwater and Scott Safian, OIEA

On June 21, 2000, FSIS Compliance Officers Jean Hillery and Tom Quadros and California Senior Investigator Bill Shaline were shot shortly after they arrived at a USDA-inspected sausage establishment in San Leandro, California. California Food Inspector Earl Willis was also shot at, but escaped injury.

Operations at the establishment were suspended because the plant was not operating in compliance with food safety regulations. Rather than correct the problems, plant owner Stuart Alexander continued to illegally produce and sell products without the required Federal inspection. FSIS and the State of California began investigations to protect the public and detain product that was already found in commerce.

Hillery, Quadros, Shaline and Willis went to the establishment to meet with the owner to collect evidence and serve notice of the violations. The owner retrieved a gun from his office, entered the retail area where Hillery, Quadros and Shaline were waiting, and opened fire, killing the three investigators. Willis was waiting outside for police, who had been called to assist with meeting with the owner. Willis was able to escape by taking shelter in a local business.

FSIS worked closely with USDA's Office of the Inspector General, the United States Attorney's Office and the State of California to help prosecute the establishment owner. The events were captured on video cameras at the establishment that the owner had turned on before confronting the public servants. On October 19, 2004, jurors convicted the owner of three counts of first-degree murder and one count of attempted murder. He was subsequently sentenced to death but died in prison of natural causes in December 2005.

Following the shootings, FSIS took multiple steps to prevent tragic events such as this one from ever happening again:

- FSIS established a Workplace Violence Prevention Taskforce, which produced and implemented actions with the Agency and industry to guard against similar attacks. The Taskforce focused on workplace violence awareness and prevention, as well as improved outreach with industry.

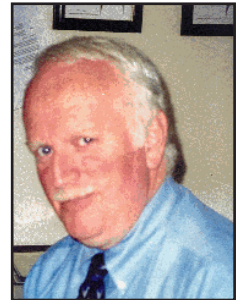


Jean Hillery

- FSIS identified and implemented measures for improving personal and worksite security by establishing the Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Program and a 24-hour toll-free helpline to report threats and incidents of workplace violence. The program focuses on awareness and prevention within the Agency and with internal and external partners. It also provides guidance, training, reporting systems and management of incidents related to workplace violence prevention and response.

- The Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG) is a multi-disciplinary Agency team whose goal is to review, monitor and track workplace violence incidents of increased severity and frequency to prevent further escalation.

- FSIS engaged with the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center to train compliance investigators on safety protocols, awareness, prevention and personal security.

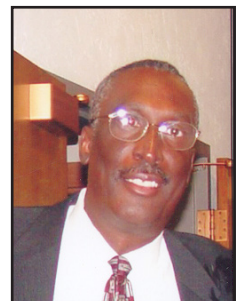


Tom Quadros

- FSIS developed investigation and regulatory directives, including protocols for investigative plans that require up-front analysis and action plans for the security of FSIS personnel and liaison, whenever needed, with Federal, state and local law enforcement agencies.

- Developed additional training and other policies to include other frontline FSIS personnel, such as Enforcement, Investigations and Analysis Officers in the Office of Field Operations.

- Established a Memorandum of Agreement with the U.S. Federal Protective Service to help keep our employees safe from a possibly dangerous encounter while carrying out the FSIS food safety mission.



Earl Willis

The Agency never envisioned a crime of this nature occurring in a USDA-inspected plant. Although it has been 20 years, Hillery, Quadros, Shaline and Willis and the events of June 21 are not forgotten. The prevention of workplace violence remains a top priority within the Agency, and FSIS is committed to the safety of all employees.

Workplace violence is any type of violence, threat, intimidation,

*Continued on page 9...*



# Under Secretary Dr. Mindy Brashears and Administrator Paul Kiecker Tour Establishments

On June 16, Office of Food Safety Under Secretary Dr. Mindy Brashears and FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker visited poultry plants in Maryland and Delaware. They provided information about protective equipment to be used during the current pandemic and answered questions from the in-plant personnel. They visited plants in Milford and Selbyville, Delaware, and Salisbury, Maryland.



At Establishment P-1318 in Milford, Delaware, Dr. Brashears (center) dons protective equipment provided to in-plant personnel for use during the COVID-19 pandemic. Inspection team members Mary White, Food Inspector at P-935 (left), and Consumer Safety Inspector Terry Warren (right) participate in the meeting. Photo by Derek Kushmerek, OM.



At Establishment P-764 in Salisbury, Maryland, Administrator Kiecker (left) and Frontline Supervisor Dr. Lindsey Ewing discuss face shields and other protective equipment for in-plant personnel to use during the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo by Derek Kushmerek, OM.



The inspection team at establishment P7927 in Hurlock, Maryland, pauses for a group photo with Dr. Brashears and Administrator Kiecker during their visit to the plant. The team has a small break area so ensures that they take other precautions when social distancing is not possible. (From left): Joe Abbott, OM; Dr. Brashears; Supervisory Public Health Veterinarians (SPHV) Ahmad Jilani and Jonica Thompson; Consumer Safety Inspectors (CSI) Laura Smith, Stewart Williams and Elizabeth Bishop; Administrator Kiecker; and CSI Cheryl Parker. Photo by Derek Kushmerek, OM.

# POLICY UPDATES

FSIS issues notices and directives to protect the public's health. New issuances are available at [www.fsis.usda.gov/regulations](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/regulations).

- Notice 21-20, Fiscal Year 2020 - Student Loan Repayment Program for In-Plant Veterinary Medical Officers - Application Process
- Notice 22-20, FSIS Microbiological Sampling of Domestic Egg Products
- Notice 23-20, Mandatory Equal Employment Opportunity and Civil Rights Training for All FSIS Supervisors
- Notice 24-20, The Families First Coronavirus Response Act Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act Provisions
- Notice 25-20, FSIS Sampling of Fowl Slaughtered Under the New Poultry Inspection System as Authorized by Waiver
- Notice 26-20, Availability of Hand Sanitizer
- Notice 27-20, FSIS Availability of Cloth Face Coverings, Disposable Masks and Face Shields
- Notice 28-20, Annual Notice to High-Mileage Drivers
- Notice 29-20, Cancellation of FSIS Directives
- Notice 30-20, Update - Use of Protective Face Coverings by FSIS Personnel to Reduce the Spread of COVID-19
- Notice 31-20, Instructions for Face Shields that Attach to Helmets
- Directive 1050.1, Requesting Participation at Non-FSIS Sponsored Meetings and Events - Revision 5
- Directive 6100.1, Ante-Mortem Livestock Inspection - Rev. 3
- Directive 8021.1, Investigative Methodology for Conducting Misconduct, Office of Inspector General Hotline, and Other Investigations - Rev. 2
- Directive 9900.4, Import Applications
- Directive 9900.8, Meat, Poultry and Egg Products Refused Entry into the United States (U.S.) - Rev. 1

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## Heat Risk in Hot Weather During the Pandemic

By Frantz Israel, OM

Phone: (202) 770-9066

As summer approaches each year, in-plant personnel (IPP) can expect to face higher temperatures and increased humidity in their work environment. These conditions put IPP at risk for heat-related illness. It's important that IPP know the risks, warning signs and steps they can take to protect themselves from heat-related illness.

### Risks for Heat-Related Illness

IPP are at the greatest risk for heat-related illness early in the summer before people's bodies have had a chance to build up a tolerance to the heat. This year, due to COVID-19, IPP are also adjusting to new protective equipment, including face masks and face coverings. While this equipment is important for preventing the spread of COVID-19, it traps heat and humidity close to the body.

Age and certain medical conditions can also put people at a greater risk, including people over 65 years of age, people who are overweight, people who are recovering from recent illness and people on certain medications, such as for depression, insomnia or poor circulation. Individuals should be aware of their personal risk factors for heat-related illness.

### Symptoms

In a warm environment, especially when physically active, the human body relies on its ability to get rid of excess heat to maintain a healthy internal body temperature. If the body cannot cool itself quickly enough, the internal body temperature keeps rising and you may experience symptoms that include thirst, irritability, a rash, cramping, heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Heat exhaustion is often a precursor to heat stroke and is associated with elevated core body temperatures from 100.4 °F to 102.2 °F. Symptoms of heat exhaustion include headache, nausea, dizziness, fatigue, weakness, thirst, heavy sweating, irritability and a decreased urine output. Thinking clearly, perception, planning, and other mental processes may become impaired. The individual may be unable to recognize dangerous situations.

Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency medical treatment is not sought and administered in a timely manner. Symptoms include confusion, clumsiness, slurred speech, fainting/unconsciousness, hot dry skin, profuse sweating, seizures, and high body temperature.

*Continued on page 9...*



assault, harassment, interference or other disruptive behavior in the workplace. It is not tolerated in FSIS because it is harmful to employees, and it prevents us from fulfilling our mission. No one can predict when violence may occur. The key to preventing workplace violence is to recognize the warning signs and involve the appropriate resources as soon as possible. Timely notification and documentation of potential problems is essential, and employees are encouraged to become familiar with Agency policy, directives and contact information so that you can take any necessary steps to ensure a safe workplace.

We must remember that our mission to ensure safe food is a noble and important one. And that those performing it — often without thanks or recognition — are some of our country’s most dedicated civil servants. FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker says, “FSIS will never forget Jean, Tom, Bill and Earl, for their courage, professionalism and commitment to the safety of our Nation’s food supply.”

A planned 20-year remembrance service has been postponed due to the ongoing pandemic. FSIS has a website dedicated to the memories of these heroes. It can be found at [www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/informational/aboutfsis/workplace-violence-prevention/in-memoriam/ct\\_index](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/informational/aboutfsis/workplace-violence-prevention/in-memoriam/ct_index).

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Heat Risk in Hot Weather

**Preventative Measures**

IPP should keep in mind the most effective preventive measures for reducing heat stress include, while also managing risks associated with COVID-19.

- IPP should be aware that conditions such as obesity, pregnancy, inadequate rest, and lack of adequate physical conditioning can greatly increase susceptibility to heat stress.
- IPP should drink plenty of water or sports drinks throughout the day, even before feeling thirsty.
- IPP should have access to plenty of dry, clean face coverings or disposable face masks so that they can be changed frequently if saturated with sweat.

**Steps to Save a Life During a Heat Stress Emergency**

Move the individual to a cool, shaded area to rest. Stay with the individual. If the individual is experiencing dizziness or lightheadedness, lay the individual on their back and raise legs 6 to 8”. If you detect symptoms of nausea, lay the individual on their side.

Loosen clothing and remove heavy garments. Offer 1 cup (8 oz.) of cool water every 15 minutes. To cool the body, fan and spray with a cool mist of water or apply a wet piece of clothing to the

individual’s skin. If the condition does not improve within a few minutes, call 911. If the individual’s symptoms include seizure, be sure to move objects from the immediate vicinity.

The following items are available for ordering from the MMSC:

FSIS-68	NECK COOLING SCARVES
FSIS-68-FP	SQWINCHERS, FRUIT PUNCH FLAVOR (BX50)
FSIS-68-FP-SF	SQWINCHERS, SUGAR FREE, FRUIT PUNCH FLAVOR (BX50)
FSIS-69-LL	SQWINCHERS, LEMON LIME FLAVOR (BX50)
FSIS-69-OR	SQWINCHERS, ORANGE FLAVOR (BX50)
FSIS-OR-SF	SQWINCHERS, SUGAR FREE, ORANGE FLAVOR (BX50)

USDA is actively exploring more solutions on this issue, including field testing more equipment such as cooling vests and evaporative cooling hard hat pads.

For more information, contact Industrial Hygienist Frantz Israel at (202) 770-9066 or [frantz.israel@usda.gov](mailto:frantz.israel@usda.gov).

Answer: It's important to understand the distinction between the return-to-work guidance for FSIS field employees who have self-certified and USDA's Reopening Playbook.

#### *In Establishments*

FSIS field personnel are unique in that they work in *regulated establishments* — not federally controlled and operated buildings. Due to their role as part of our Nation's critical infrastructure, regulated establishments were not proactively closed in the same way that federal office buildings were. Work sites in regulated establishments have essentially remained in the equivalent of USDA's Phase 3 status throughout the pandemic. For this reason, and with full protective equipment available to in-plant personnel (IPP), on May 22, the Agency provided separate return-to-work guidance for field employees who have self-certified that work in regulated establishments. The return-to-work guidance provides tailored, risk-based guidance for those field employees. It also includes a decision tree to assist supervisors and the employees to determine their eligibility for Weather and Safety Leave or other options. If an employee believes that special protective equipment is needed to return to work or that other precautions should be in place before they return to work, they could use the reasonable accommodation process to make those types of requests. (See more information below.)

#### *Office Situations*

The USDA Reopening Playbook is for reopening *USDA facilities* (not industry establishments regulated by USDA) that were closed due to COVID-19 related reasons. It also provides guidance for how agencies should bring employees who work in those USDA facilities back on site to work. For FSIS, this primarily applies to office situations. Every location will not reopen at the same time or follow the same schedule for each phase. Local pandemic coordinators will lead in determining the appropriate phase for each FSIS facility. The information will be communicated to employees through their supervisory structure. If an employee believes that special protective equipment is needed to return to work or that telework should continue, they should talk to their supervisor and consider using the reasonable accommodation process to make a request, if necessary.

#### *Reasonable Accommodations*

The reasonable accommodation process is designed and intended to be unique for each employee, and each case will be handled and considered individually. The outcomes will vary, based on the employee's specific circumstances and the recommendations of their healthcare provider. There is no special or specific reasonable accommodation for COVID-19 or for employees who have self-certified as high-risk. All reasonable accommodation requests, including those related to COVID-19, will follow the existing process. It is designed and intended to find a reasonable solution that *allows the employee to work with an accommodation*.

More information about the Agency's reasonable

accommodation program and access to forms is available at [ohportal.fsis.usda.gov/services/reasonable-accommodation-program/](https://ohportal.fsis.usda.gov/services/reasonable-accommodation-program/) (an eAuthentication account is required). You may also request information and request and submit forms by emailing [ReasonableAccommodations@usda.gov](mailto:ReasonableAccommodations@usda.gov).

#### **Heat Stress Illness**

We know that in some facilities, especially slaughter establishments, high temperatures and humidity can contribute to an increased risk of heat stress illness. Given the COVID-19 situation and requirements for additional protective gear, we need to be even more vigilant as we enter the summer season. The face coverings and face shields are important equipment to help protect both FSIS and plant employees from the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace, and we do not plan to waive these requirements. But, we recognize that this added equipment can trap heat close to the body and contribute to heat stress. In-plant personnel need to be aware of their own health and risk factors that could put them at increased risk for heat stress illness. For details about heat stress illness, how to prevent it and how to treat it, please see the article on page 8.

#### **Leave and Leave Codes**

##### *Reminders*

Information about FSIS implementation of the entitlements under the Families First Coronavirus Recovery Act is available in the user notice issued on May 5 that is available on the FSIS employee page at [www.fsis.usda.gov/employees](https://www.fsis.usda.gov/employees). The May Spotlight of *The Beacon* also included an article on leave related to COVID-19 situations.

FSIS does not have authorization to raise the leave ceiling to 360 hours, although that has been requested across federal agencies. We also do not have authorization to pay out excess annual leave balances, above 240 hours, except for employees separating from federal service. The USDA Office of Human Resources and Management is looking at solutions, through OPM and within USDA. Employees should continue to take their scheduled annual leave to avoid the possibility of losing annual leave from a balance that exceeds 240 hours at the end of the leave year.

Question: An in-plant PHV from the Jackson District asks how the return to work guidance for employees who have self-certified would apply to those recently diagnosed with cancer and starting treatment during COVID-19. "If, per the decision tree, an employee is not eligible for Code 66, Weather and Safety Leave, due to availability of supplies and establishment screening procedures, what more can be done to ensure their safety? Especially if there are still positive cases arising within the plant weekly?"

Answer: First, we want the employee to get well before returning to work. The leave options available include Annual

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Leave, Leave Without Pay and entitlements through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, called Emergency Paid Sick Leave. If the employee is sick with a cancer diagnosis, then Accrued Sick Leave, Advanced Sick Leave or use of the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) are also options. They may also want to consider the FSIS leave bank program.

### Use of Protective Equipment

#### Reminders

Wearing a face covering *and* face shield are mandatory for FSIS in-plant personnel. This is required as soon as you have access to them.

A link to the guidance to industry from the CDC and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) that addresses using face coverings in meat and poultry establishments entitled, "Meat and Poultry Processing Workers and Employers: Interim Guidance from CDC and OSHA," is available on the FSIS website's employee page at [www.fsis.usda.gov/employees](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/employees).

### Availability of Protective Equipment and Supplies

#### Face Coverings, Masks and Shields

Anti-fogging supplies are available to order to assist with maintaining shields. Employees also need to follow the maintenance instructions for their particular masks and shields. Instructions are available. Any employee who previously received the headband style face shield but would like to try new clip-on style may order these now. Orders should be placed through the Material Management Service Center (MMSC). See the user notices or the FSIS employee page at [www.fsis.usda.gov/employees](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/employees) for specifics on how to order each item, including codes.

#### Reminders

Cloth face coverings and disposable face masks are available to order from the MMSC. There are enough face coverings, disposable face masks and face shields to provide to all in-plant personnel. The Agency has a sufficient supply so IPP can choose which type of covering they prefer to use with their face shield.

We are requiring industry to supply inspectors with face coverings when they are providing them for their own employees. If establishments are providing face coverings to FSIS employees, you are required to use those to ensure establishment requirements are met.

FSIS has authorized a one-time reimbursement to all FSIS employees who are required to perform FSIS duties outside of their residence up to \$50 for the purchase of face coverings or materials to make face coverings. These items must have been purchased prior to May 31 in order to be reimbursed. Specific instructions on how to claim reimbursement are provided in FSIS Notice 19-20.

*Claims must be submitted by July 31, 2020.*

### Workers' Compensation Claims

#### Reminder

Federal employees who develop COVID-19 while performing their duties are entitled to file a claim for workers' compensation coverage pursuant to the Federal Employees' Compensation Act. Federal agencies process workers' compensation claims through the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). DOL created new procedures to specifically address COVID-19 claims. More information is also available through a link on the FSIS employees' webpage at [www.fsis.usda.gov/employees](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/employees). Employees should work with their supervisors during the claims process, as usual. If you have questions, you can email [AskWorkersComp@usda.gov](mailto:AskWorkersComp@usda.gov).

### Establishment Activities

Question: "There is some confusion about when you may enter an establishment if their criteria are more restrictive than the basic CDC guidance. If an employee does not meet an establishment's screening criteria, should they be allowed to enter, should they be replaced or the line speed adjusted accordingly? This is currently being handled where inspectors are being detailed to other plants if they cannot meet the screening criteria at their own plant."

Answer: The reasons why an inspector might be denied entry could vary. In one example, it was because an FSIS employee had test results pending from another establishment in their circuit and another establishment was denying them entry pending results of those test results. If an establishment denies entry to an inspector based on a screening program, the employee will need to involve their supervisor to help guide next steps. In some cases, supervisors or districts may need to detail inspectors as necessary for coverage.

#### Reminders

Enforcing CDC recommendations for COVID-19 or mandating reporting of illnesses falls outside of FSIS regulatory jurisdiction. However, FSIS has been consistent and clear with industry that establishments are expected follow CDC recommendations to slow the spread of COVID-19 and inform FSIS of cases of COVID-19 among their employees. FSIS will inform industry of positive findings of FSIS personnel so that each entity can make informed decisions regarding employee health and safety. If testing is being required by the establishment or local health department, the establishment or local health department will be responsible for the cost. Even if the testing is not being mandated, we encourage FSIS employees to take advantage of testing provided by local health departments and any provided by the establishment.





## RECALLS AND PUBLIC HEALTH ALERTS

May 2	A public health alert was issued for a Wisconsin establishment because 34,200 pounds of ready-to-eat (RTE) chicken noodle soup products were sold that were misbranded and contained an undeclared allergen.
May 2	A public health alert was issued for a Philadelphia establishment for approximately 70 pounds of raw beef ravioli products that may be contaminated with <i>E. coli</i> O157:H7.
May 12	A Nevada establishment recalled approximately 3,302 pounds of meat and poultry flatbread pizza products that were produced, packed and distributed without the benefit of federal inspection.
May 13	A Texas establishment recalled approximately 3,796 pounds of RTE pork skin products due to misbranding and an undeclared allergen.
May 22	An Arkansas and a Missouri establishment expanded recall 007-2020 to approximately 276,872 pounds of not RTE chicken and turkey bowl products that may contain extraneous material with additional products.
May 28	An Arkansas establishment recalled approximately 29,002 pounds of chicken products due to misbranding and undeclared allergen.

For more information, go to [www.fsis.usda.gov/recalls](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/recalls).

## FSIS Leadership Wants to Hear from You

FSIS employees work tirelessly to support our mission to protect the public by preventing foodborne illness. It takes all of us working together to achieve our goals.

Administrator Paul Kiecker encourages employees to send feedback, comments, concerns, ideas, stories of teamwork and more to [FSISFeedback@usda.gov](mailto:FSISFeedback@usda.gov).

### Your Feedback is Important

Send us comments and successes.



Resource sharing



Teamwork



Solutions



**FSIS Employee Connections** is an employee-centric publication that focuses on employees' off-duty activities, personal accomplishments and creativity. As a quarterly supplement to *The Beacon*, the *Connections* features the personalities that make up FSIS through employee profiles, inspiring community service and creative visual and literary works.

Send submissions for the Summer 2020 issue by July 15. Email submissions to [FSISConnections@usda.gov](mailto:FSISConnections@usda.gov). Photos should be high-resolution in .jpg format and sent as an attachment and include a detailed description of who is in the image (name, title and program area), what is taking place, the date and location it was taken, and the name, title and program area of the person who captured the image. Include approval from your supervisor. Provide a media consent form for individuals under 18 years of age. If you have questions or need the consent form, contact Laura Reiser at [Laura.Reiser@usda.gov](mailto:Laura.Reiser@usda.gov) or (202) 720-7894, or Felicia Thompson at [Felicia.Thompson@usda.gov](mailto:Felicia.Thompson@usda.gov) or (202) 603-2150.

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FSIS employees and applicants for employment wishing to file an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaint must first contact an EEO Counselor by calling (301) 504-7755 or 1-800-269-6912, or writing to the FSIS Civil Rights Division at USDA/FSIS, 5601 Sunnyside Avenue, Building 1, Room 2260, Mail Drop 5261, Beltsville, MD 20705. Contact must be made with an FSIS EEO Counselor within 45 calendar days of the date of the matter alleged to be discriminatory or, in the case of a personnel action, within 45 calendar days of the effective date of the personnel action.