

Food Product Recalls:

What the Retail Food Industry Needs to Know



The ability to quickly and effectively remove products from the marketplace has always been vital to large and small businesses which grow, pack, process and distribute foods. It is equally important for restaurants, retail food establishments and others in the retail food industry to understand the recall process and respond quickly. A successful response to a food product recall can help protect the retail food industry from unnecessary economic loss and the loss of consumer confidence.

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Regulatory Agencies Involved in Food Product Recalls

Several regulatory agencies that work closely with businesses throughout the food industry to ensure that safe products are delivered to consumers can request food product recalls. Those agencies are:


Food and Drug Administration in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The FDA is responsible for the safety and purity of all food products, including chewing gum, shell eggs and animal feed with the exception of meat and poultry. By agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the FDA oversees recalls that involve egg products.


Food Safety Inspection Service in the U.S.D.A. The FSIS is responsible for the safety of meat, poultry and egg products, and inspects thousands of processing plants annually.

N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA and CS). The NCDA and CS are responsible for the regulation of FDA and FSIS food products in North Carolina.


Food Recall Classifications

A recall is the procedure(s) initiated and conducted by the responsible commercial firm to remove or correct a product in commerce that federal or state regulatory authorities consider, or may consider, to be in violation of food laws. Recalls are classified by the seriousness of the adverse health effects of allowing the contaminated product onto the market.

 **Class I Recall:** The most severe classification involves a health hazard situation where there is a reasonable probability that the use of the product will cause serious adverse health consequences or death. Examples of Class I recalls include confirmed cases of *Clostridium botulinum* toxin in food; *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat foods; all *Salmonella* in ready-to-eat foods; and undeclared allergens such as a food with an ingredient that is a common cause of serious allergic reactions but is not labeled to indicate these contents.

 **Class II Recall:** A Class II recall involves a health hazard situation where there is a remote possibility of adverse health consequences from use of the product.

Examples of Class II recalls include *botulinum* potential and *Norovirus* contamination in seafood.

 **Class III Recall:** A Class III recall involves a situation where use of the product will not cause adverse health consequences, or the risk is negligible. Examples of Class III recalls include incorrect weight or volume labeling, non-organic products being labeled as organic, a food product that may have been produced under unsanitary conditions or that is decomposing, or a food that contains yeast or mold contamination except fresh breads.

Responsibilities of Retail Food Service Establishments

Stay Informed of Food Product Recalls

REMOVE RECALLED FOOD PRODUCTS

All food service establishments should maintain day-to-day awareness of new food product recalls. Several sources of information are available for the latest information.

- **The FDA Website**, www.fda.gov, contains official press releases from the recalling firms for all products except meat and poultry.
- **The FSIS Website**, www.fsis.usda.gov, has the official press release(s) from the recalling firm(s) for all food products, including meat and poultry products.
- **Food manufacturing companies** maintain information of recalled foods they manufacture and/or distribute.
- **Distribution companies** maintain awareness of food product recalls and remove recalled products from their distribution. Many also will inform food service establishments in their distribution chain of the recalled products that were recently purchased from their company.
- **The media** often carries news reports regarding food product recalls but should not be relied upon as the primary source of recall information.

IDENTIFY RECALLED FOOD PRODUCTS

Several aspects of product identification are typically released by the recalling firm. Food service establishments should use the information to identify and distinguish recalled products from similar products that are safe to consume. The following information should be identified:

- **Product name**, including all brand names and generic name;
- **Product code numbers** (such as lot/unit numbers, expiration dates, use-by dates and UPC codes); and
- **Product description** (such as powder, liquid, ready-to-eat, expected shelf-life, packaging type and size).

Once identified, food service establishments should immediately remove all recalled food products and menu items containing the recalled products as ingredients. The products and menu items containing recalled ingredients should be segregated from other food products and returned to the vendor or destroyed. Detailed instructions from the manufacturer or regulatory authority will specify the methods to use for product destruction to ensure that the products are not retrieved and consumed. Simply placing them in a dumpster may not be sufficient. Removal of the recalled products should be documented, including quantity removed, date removed and person responsible for removal.

DEVELOP A PLAN

Each food service establishment should have procedures by which food product recalls are addressed. The plan should include:

- **the person(s)** responsible for receiving information on food product recalls
- **the procedures** for how the information is communicated to key employees
- **the procedures** by which the products are identified and removed from service, and
- **the procedures** for how new, safe products will be put into inventory.

