

Food businesses in Wisconsin may at some time require a recall of contaminated product. The Division of Food Safety, after determining that a food may be contaminated — through inspection & observation, sampling & testing, or during an outbreak of foodborne illness — often asks the producer if it will voluntarily recall the product from distribution and/or sale in the state. In the event of a recall, the DFS will contact a responsible individual at that business and negotiate a voluntary recall. Below is an example news release:

MADISON, WI – The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection announced today that the Sunny Farms Ice Cream Company is voluntarily recalling 2000 gallons of chocolate ice cream contaminated with pathogenic bacteria, XYZ. State food safety officials & SFICC are advising the public to avoid eating the ice cream which has been distributed to the Milwaukee area since May 1. SFICC called all wholesale customers earlier this morning and instructed the grocery stores to remove the product from store shelves.

Businesses that decide not to voluntarily recall products determined to be contaminated may then be the subject of a food advisory, distributed to the news media, which names the food product and its producer. Such unilateral action taken by the DFS – charged with protecting the state’s food supply – may include holding orders and later an order from the Secretary of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection which stops the sale of any food produced by the business in question. Below is an example news release:

MADISON, WI – The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection announced today that the DFS is advising the public to avoid eating chocolate ice cream produced

by the Sunny Farms Ice Cream Company. The ice cream may be contaminated with pathogenic bacteria, XYZ, and has been sold in the Milwaukee area since May 1. State food safety officials said that SFICC has refused to voluntarily recall the affected ice cream and estimated that 2000 gallons of affected ice cream remain on grocery store shelves.

What to Expect

Regulators

In the case of food product contamination, the DFS and other regulatory agencies will likely ask the following questions:

- Where is the contaminated product?
- Who are the customers who bought the product?
- How much of the affected product has been produced?
- Has the product been distributed further to a second-level customer?
- Has the product reached the general public?

Documentation & Planning

Keeping reliable records of sales and distribution can make a product recall safer, more efficient and more effective. For example, a system of code or lot dating can make tracing contaminated shipments of food product relatively simple.

A recall plan can also be a beneficial component of business planning. A recall plan might also include documentation of product’s disposition when it has been returned. Some questions to consider are: Where will the contaminated food be segregated or stored? Will it be reprocessed or disposed of? In the case of disposal,

how and where will that occur? Can the disposal be documented for food inspectors?

Food producers should also be aware that a recall might involve multiple regulatory agencies, especially if contaminated products have been sent out of Wisconsin. These may include local health departments, the federal FDA and/or USDA.

Customers

Businesses will be asked to notify their wholesale business customers of the recall. Immediate contact required by the DFS would be by telephone or fax; later a written statement should be sent to customers. All contacts would be documented for the DFS. The information must be specific and detailed, including the problem (“contains pathogenic bacteria that may cause human illness”), the product (“Triple Chocolate Ice Cream, Lot #3400”), and what should be done with the affected product. Below is an example letter:

Urgent Food Recall	May 7, 2002
Dear Client:	
Sunny Farms Ice Cream regrets to inform you that a recent shipment of Sunny Farms Triple Chocolate Ice Cream – lot dated 4CH323-050201 – has been found to be contaminated by pathogenic bacteria, XYZ. These bacteria may cause illness. Do not sell or distribute it....	

News Media

If the contaminated food has been distributed to the general public, a food recall news release may also be appropriate. (continued on other side)

Here are some points to remember in preparing to contact the public:

- Have a representative available to explain the recall action to the news media and the general public
- Have a telephone answering machine, call-forwarding, or other mechanisms available to ensure easy access
- Explain the recall plan with any employees involved in the recall process.
- Consult the Division of Food Safety's public information officer for help in writing a news release or preparing to deal with questions from the news media.

Be prepared to answer specific questions about:

- what should be done with the affected product (such as "Return it to point of purchase for a refund" or "Send the label to us and we will mail a refund to you")
- the safety of other products (such as "The only recalled product is the chocolate ice cream in 1-gallon containers, with the code number of 01233, stamped on top lid of container in black ink. All other SFICC ice cream is NOT being recalled.")
- the cause of the problem that prompted the recall
- what is being done to correct that problem

General Public

Food producers who must recall contaminated products must also consider their communication

with the general public, in case the product has been sold to the public. Consumers might ask the following questions:

- Can I get my money back? How?
- What do I do with the contaminated product?
- Is it safe to eat your other products?

(See also the specific questions for news media, above)

For all instances of communication concerning the recall, have a written document prepared in order to be consistent in disseminating information. At the same time, be prepared to answer specific questions not covered by the document.



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By electronic mail at food@datcp.state.wi.us
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How to Conduct a Voluntary Food Product Recall



The Wisconsin Division of Food Safety routinely helps food producers with any necessary recall of contaminated foods.

This brochure provides advice on preparing for a potential recall. Contact the DFS for more information about food product recalls.

From farm to table...

WISCONSIN DIVISION OF
Food Safety