

# codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE  
ORGANIZATION  
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ORGANIZATION



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Agenda Item 3

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## JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD IMPORT AND EXPORT INSPECTION AND CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS

Twelfth Session

Brisbane, Australia, 1 – 5 December 2003

### PROPOSED DRAFT REVISION TO THE CODEX GUIDELINES FOR THE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION IN FOOD CONTROL EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

(AT STEP 3)

Comments from Argentina, Canada, Iran, Mexico, New Zealand, United States and European  
Community

#### ARGENTINA

#### PREAMBLE

Argentina considers that the current wording of the preamble does not exactly reflect the extent of the emergency, and so those cases in which there is a failure to comply with the destination country's standards may end up being included. This compliance failure does not necessarily represent a health emergency, such as the case in which the food may cause a serious threat to health or life, which cannot be contained, controlled or which at its time of appearance is of unknown extent.

1. ~~When a food emergency arises, in order to minimise potential adverse public health effects, As a consequence of the global food trade, certain health emergencies related to the food's loss of health qualities, may seriously affect human health and life. In these cases, it is essential to communicate the nature and extent of the food safety problem hazard detected or the causal effect between the consumption of a food and the appearance of serious effects that are harmful to health to all relevant parties as expeditiously as possible. The global nature of food trade often requires that this communication occur between~~ This communication should initially be made through nations at a government level.

2. This document provides guidance for use by national governments ~~and regional economic integration organisations~~ for the exchange of information in food safety emergency situations, that may cause serious issues for human health and life. These guidelines replace guidance presented in the Codex Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Control Emergency Situations (CAC/GL 19-1995).

#### SCOPE

3. These Guidelines apply to situations where the competent authorities become aware of a food safety emergency situation, that may cause serious threat to human health and life, and communication of the information risks surrounding the emergency situation must be undertaken. **/Changes suggested to the Spanish in this paragraph: debe deben llevarse llevar/**

4. The Directives apply to situations where ~~the a food safety hazard~~ in foods may cause a serious threat for human health and life, (e.g., a microbiological, chemical, or physical agent), has been specifically identified, as well as to situations where the food safety hazard has not been identified, but association and/or a causal effect has been established between consumption of a food and the appearance of serious health effects, when the hazard has not even been identified and providing the Competent Authority has justified reasons to believe that the hazard may perhaps not be able to be contained/controlled, or is of unknown extent.

5. The Guidelines will be applied for the exchange of information when the emergency situation occurs in products apply to food safety emergencies associated with imported or exported or food that may potentially be imported or exported. The Guidelines may also apply to such emergencies where feeding stuffs for food producing animals are implicated.

6. The Guidelines do not apply to routine food rejections where importing country standards have not been met, even when the failure to comply with said standards involves issues of food safety that are not included in the cases of emergency situations that may cause serious effects for human health and life defined in these Guidelines. The cases mentioned in the previous paragraph. These situations are covered in the Guidelines for the Exchange of Information between Countries on Rejections of Imported Food (CAC/GL 25-1997).

## DEFINITIONS

7. Food Safety Emergency: A situation, whether accidental or intentional, that exists when a competent authority:

- identifies a serious risk or threat for the health or life of consumers associated with the consumption of food;
- determines that the threat may not be contained/controlled or its extent may be unknown; and,
- determines that urgent action is required.

## PRINCIPLES

8. In the event that a competent authority identifies an food safety emergency situation as defined in paragraph 7 the following principles apply to the exchange of information:

a) The nature and extent of the declared food safety emergency, including the precise identification of the hazard and its extent, or the risk in those cases in which the emergency situation is the result of a causal effect between the consumption of the food and the appearance of serious effects for human health, should, to the extent possible, be clearly and completely /change suggested to the Spanish: de manera clara y completamente completa/ described by the competent authority.

b) The exchange of information on food safety emergencies should be between competent authorities who should designate official contact points.

b.1) A country detecting a food safety emergency situation, whether as the importing or exporting country, should in the first instance communicate the emergency situation through the competent authorities to the competent authorities in the importing country or countries or the exporting country.

~~c) A country detecting a~~ Once the importing/exporting country has communicated the food safety emergency situation detected whether it is an importing or exporting country to the competent authorities of the importing/exporting country, it should inform all potentially affected trading partners without delay.

~~-d) All relevant information should be shared to enable potentially affected countries to make informed risk management decisions.~~

d) Once the communication referred to in point b.1) has been made and the counterparty or counterparties have noted the nature of the emergency situation advised, it or they should share said information to enable other potentially affected countries to make informed decisions in their territory.

e) Competent authorities should provide clear, relevant, factual and timely information to all stakeholders.

f) Information flow should be transparent and continue during ~~all phases of the risk analysis process (risk assessment as appropriate to circumstance, risk management and risk communication) to enable continuous evaluation and development of the emergency response~~ the course of the emergency situation.

Comment: Argentina does not agree that this document include all risk analysis stages, and as a consequence, suggests the following paragraph.

## NATURE OF THE FOOD SAFETY EMERGENCY

9. The nature of the food safety emergency including its scientific basis as it becomes available should be described in a clear, concise and accurate manner. ~~Whenever possible, the food safety hazard, e.g. microbiological contamination or chemical or physical agent, and the source of the contamination causing the food safety hazard should be identified. Any clear and substantial association between the consumption of a food and the appearance of serious adverse health effects should be reported by the competent authority as it becomes available, in accordance with the principles outlined in paragraph 8, even in circumstances where the specific food safety hazard has not been precisely identified. When the emergency situation has been declared following identification of the food safety hazard, e.g. microbiological contamination or chemical or physical agent, and the source of the contamination causing the food safety hazard is known, this information should be included in the relevant authority's report; when the specific food safety hazard has been precisely identified and the emergency has been determined as a causal effect between the consumption of a food and the appearance of serious health effects, this information along with that concerning the risk of not containing/controlling it or its unknown extent, should be stated in the competent authority's report.~~

10. In cases where the food safety hazard is associated with the specific food or foods, these foods should be identified in as much detail as is available to facilitate the identification and location of the affected foods. In other cases, where the food safety hazard affects many different categories of foods and potentially involves a large geographical area, all affected foods should be identified.

## OFFICIAL CONTACT POINTS FOR INFORMATION EXCHANGE

11. The designated contact points for the competent authorities responsible for coordinating the response to the food safety emergency should be clearly identified. Necessary information includes the name of the competent authority and name, address, phone and facsimile numbers, and email address of the person or offices that are responsible for managing the emergency situation and who can provide further details about the hazard, the foods concerned, actions taken and other relevant information. A website address should also be provided if this is used to provide up-to-date information.

12. A list of official contact points for the exchange of information in food safety emergency situations as mentioned in point 8.b<sup>1</sup> is available and an update is distributed to governments on a periodic basis. It is the responsibility of all countries to ensure that they regularly provide updated information on their country contact points ~~to the [organisation to be determined]~~, so that the list of contacts can be kept up-to-date. Although the official contact point is the first contact, it is understood that in a given food safety emergency national governments may wish to designate a specific content point for the emergency.

## INFORMING POTENTIALLY AFFECTED TRADING PARTNERS

13. Given the global nature of food trade, the impact of the food safety emergency may be widespread. The competent authority of the country where the food safety emergency is identified should, to the best of its ability, determine all potential recipient countries of the implicated food(s) and all countries from which the potentially contaminated food or its ingredients was imported. All relevant information in relation to the food safety emergency should be provided to the competent authorities of the countries thus identified.

14. Communication should be made by the most expedient means, as early as possible, and with verification of receipt by key parties. Communications by telephone, email, facsimile and regular mail should be considered to achieve early communication and to ensure that the message is received by the competent authorities as quickly as possible.

15. It is recognised that the initial information provided may often be incomplete and it is therefore the responsibility of the country identifying the food emergency to ensure that the initial communication is supplemented by further notification(s) as and when more detailed information becomes available.

## INFORMATION TO BE EXCHANGED

16. Competent authorities should exchange with affected trading partners the following information, as relevant upon identification of food safety emergency and having made official communications to the interested counterparties.

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<sup>1</sup> The list of contacts for Food Import Control and Information Exchange in Food Control Emergency Situations is maintained by the Codex Contact Point for Australia, Australian Government, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, GPO Box 858, Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia, email: [codex.contact@affa.gov.au](mailto:codex.contact@affa.gov.au).

- a. The nature of the food safety emergency including the hazards and risk is identified ~~/change to Spanish: hayan identificado identifiquen~~, the diagnostic methodology used and assumptions findings made
- b. Detailed identification of the food or foods concerned including profit margins, certificate information
- c. The affected populations group(s)
- d. Shipping and related information, e.g. the name and contact information for the exporter, importer, consignee and shippers
- e. Action taken to reduce or eliminate the hazard

17. The communication regarding the nature and extent of a food safety emergency should include relevant scientific substantiation ~~and assessment of risk as they become available~~, including how international standards have been taken into account.

18. A standard format for the relevant information to be exchanged is recommended for use by both the importing and exporting countries. A model standard format for information exchange in food safety emergency situations is provided as Attachment 1. Where alternative formats are used, care should be taken to ensure that the relevant information is included and is clearly presented.

### **ROLE OF COMPETENT AUTHORITY**

19. Upon identification of a food safety emergency, the competent authority identifying the emergency should promptly communicate with and consult the appropriate competent authority/ies of other affected country/ies. The competent authorities responsible for coordinating the response should update countries receiving the affected food of action taken, as appropriate. The accuracy of the scientific and other information regarding the food safety emergency should be verified. Any misinformation should be promptly corrected by competent authorities.

### **INFORMATION FLOW**

20. Communications between exporting and importing countries should be transparent and continue through all phases of the emergency situation, from initial notification of the food safety problem ~~including details of any relevant risk assessments that have been used through to notification of the resolution of the problem~~. This will enable countries to re-assess their risk assessment, risk management and risk communication strategies as the situation changes.

### **COMMUNICATION WITH OTHER PARTIES**

21. It is also essential that all other relevant parties be kept informed, as appropriate, of the nature and status of the food safety emergency. Competent authorities should therefore provide clear, relevant, factual and timely information to their industry, consumers, other stakeholders and the media on the status of the food safety emergency.

### **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR INFORMATION EXCHANGE**

#### **Level of food distribution**

22. In deciding on the appropriate communication measures to apply, the competent authorities should consider the quantity of food that is involved, the extent of its distribution and the level (e.g. wholesale, retail) at which it has been distributed. In some cases, the affected food may not have entered the importing country and communication will focus on the importers. However, in other cases the food will have entered and been distributed within the country. In these cases, the competent authority should take account of whether the food item has been, or is likely to have been, distributed at the wholesale, retail or consumer level, and implement risk management and communication measures accordingly, including a notice of recall at one or more of these levels of food distribution. In all these cases, there should have been prior communication between the competent authorities of the countries involved.

**Re-export of food subject to an emergency situation.**

23. Food that is refused entry into a country, or in some cases food that is recalled after entry, should be dealt with in accordance with CAC/GL 25-1997<sup>2</sup> and taking into account the *Code of Ethics for International Trade in Foods* that is currently under revision by the Codex Committee on General Principles.

**Rapid Alert System**

24. A rapid alert system can be an important component of a food safety emergency information exchange system. A rapid alert system should contain elements that both help identify the existence of a food safety emergency situation and to communicate the existence of the food safety problem to competent authorities.

**Food Safety Emergency Action Plan**

25. Importing and exporting countries /Spanish = “The countries and exporters...”/ should develop a national food safety emergency plan that would indicate procedures to be followed in the case of food safety emergency. The plan should contain specific provision relating to the exchange of information ~~including keeping the public informed,~~ which may include informing the public when the food is in a distribution phase downstream from the product’s entry into the country, as appropriate, of food safety emergency.

**Role of FAO and WHO**

26. Although the information exchange components of these guidelines are primarily intended for use between the competent authorities of the importing and exporting countries, copies or summaries of selected information regarding the emergency should be provided to FAO, WHO or other international organisations on request, to assist in international food safety emergency. In these situations, the FAO and WHO, may be able to offer technical advice and assistance to one or more of the affected countries or countries yet to be affected.

**CANADA**

Canada would like to thank Australia and members of the drafting group for the revisions made to this document. Important elements of clarification raised in previous sessions of the CCFICS have been taken into consideration in this revised document. We are pleased to offer the following comments:

**GENERAL COMMENT**

Canada would like to note that clarification on the scope of the document to “information exchange in food emergency situations” and addition of the definition of “Food Safety Emergency” with the consequential changes in the text resulted in a much clearer and more succinct document.

We have a general concern regarding the distinct responsibilities of importing and exporting countries to inform affected trading partners. The guidelines should clarify their distinctive roles in a way that takes into account the information available to them. We have specific suggestions in that regard in paragraphs 8 (principle c) and 13.

**SPECIFIC COMMENTS****Paragraph 5**

As noted by the Working Group in the background (paragraph 9 e), Canada is of the opinion that reference to animal feedstuffs in paragraph 5 of the text is sufficient. We would like to note, however, that other contaminated agricultural inputs should be included (e.g., contaminated fertilizer). We recommend amendments to the second sentence of paragraph 5 as follows:

*The guidelines may also apply to such emergencies where feeding stuffs for food producing animals or other agricultural inputs are implicated.*

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<sup>2</sup> Guidelines for the Exchange of Information between Countries on Rejection of Imported Food. (CAC/GL 25-1997)

**Paragraph 7:**

Canada suggests amending bullet points 2 and 3 as follows. To be consistent with the first bullet point, we recommend adding “risk or” before “threat” in the second bullet point. We also suggest adding “adequately” before “controlled” to clarify the rest of the sentence. The last bullet point should be amended to specify what would be the purpose of the urgent action:

(Bullet 2) · determines that the **risk or threat** may not be ~~contained~~ **adequately** controlled or its extent may be unknown; and,

(Bullet 3) · determines that urgent action is required **to mitigate the risk**.

**Paragraph 8 (principle c):**

Canada would like to note that an importing country would not be able to “inform all potentially affected trading partners” as this information is normally known only by the exporting country. We recommend rephrasing as follows to take this into account:

*8c. An importing country detecting a food safety emergency situation should inform the exporting country without delay. An exporting country detecting or made aware of a food safety emergency situation, ~~whether it is an importing or an exporting country,~~ should inform all potentially affected trading partners without delay.*

Further, the Committee may consider whether the above should be separated into two principles, one addressing the responsibility of the importing country and the other the responsibility of the exporting country.

**Paragraph 10:**

We recommend the following changes to improve accuracy and readability:

*In cases where the food safety hazard is associated with a specific food or foods, these foods should be ~~identified~~ **described** in as much detail as is available to facilitate the identification and location of the affected foods. In other cases, where a food safety hazard affects many different categories of foods and potentially involves a large geographical area, all affected foods **and destinations** should be identified.*

**Paragraph 11:**

We recommend changes to the second sentence as follows. The level of information that will be exchanged (e.g. about the hazard, the foods concerned, actions taken and other relevant information) is clearly specified in other sections of the text (i.e. Paragraph 16 and Annex 1). This paragraph should deal with the identification of the official contact point only:

*Necessary information includes the name of the competent authority and **the** names, addresses, phone and facsimile numbers, and email addresses of the persons or offices that are responsible for managing the emergency situation and who can provide further **information** ~~details about the hazard, the foods concerned, actions taken and other relevant information.~~*

**Paragraph 12:**

Canada suggests that it would be appropriate for either WHO or FAO to maintain such a list given their multilateral nature and the role they may play in assisting and providing information for food safety emergency situations. They may also be natural places for an implicated country to go to in times of food safety emergencies. We note for example in the background (paragraph 3, 5<sup>th</sup> bullet) that consideration is given to the FAO Rapid Alert System.

**Suggested New Paragraph Preceding Paragraph 13:**

Under the section “Informing Potentially Affected Trading Partners” we recommend adding a new paragraph, preceding the actual paragraph 13, to acknowledge the legal constraints of competent authorities in divulging information to third parties. The text would be as follows:

*It is recognized that the nature and extent of the information disclosure to each competent authorities will be as determined to be permissible by the disclosing competent authority according to its national law.*

**Paragraph 13:**

We recommend the following changes to the second sentence of the paragraph to improve clarity regarding the responsibilities of importing and exporting countries:

*To the best of its ability, the competent authority of the country where the food safety emergency is identified should, **if it is the exporting country**, ~~to the best of its ability, determines all potential recipient countries of the implicated food(s) and, if it is the importing country, determine all countries from which the potentially contaminated food or its ingredients was imported.~~*

**Paragraph 14:**

It is unclear what is meant by “verification of receipt by key parties”.

**Paragraph 16:**

In bullet 16b, we recommend changing the word “identification” to “description”.

**Paragraph 24:**

We find that the term “rapid alert system” is unclear in the context of these guidelines. Is it meant to be something more rapid than what is currently described in these guidelines?

**Paragraph 25:**

We recommend amending the second sentence as follows to add clarity:

*The plan should contain specific provision relating to the exchange of information **as per these guidelines** including keeping their public informed, as appropriate, of **a** food safety emergency.*

**Annex 1**

We recommend deleting the second sentence of the first paragraph as it attempts to define what is a food safety emergency situation without clearly listing the three required elements. The definition is already provided in the body of the document (Paragraph 7) and the reader should refer to it when consulting Annex 1.

**Footnote #3:**

As per our comment regarding paragraph 5, we would like to include in the footnote reference to other contaminated agricultural inputs (e.g., contaminated fertilizer). We recommend amending the footnote as follows:

<sup>3</sup> *It should be noted that the guidelines may also apply to such emergencies where feeding stuffs for food producing animals **or other agricultural inputs** are implicated.*

**2. Identification of foods concerned:**

In some cases, the affected food may be in transit to its final destination. We recommend adding a bullet point to the list of information that should be provided, if available, as follows:

- ***container, vessel or conveyance number, estimated date of arrival and the port of entry, when the affected food is in transit to its final destination.***

**IRAN**

Please find our comments about the document on “Principles and Guidelines For the Exchange of the Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations (step3)” as follows:

1-We suggest that the objective(s) of this guideline be reflected more clearly under “SCOPE”, paras 3 to 6.

2-The following additions are suggested under “Information to be exchanged” , sub-para to be added under para 16:

- f. Present whereabouts, storage location(s), or distribution boundaries of food in question.
- g. Recall status of distributed food in question.
- h. Expected actions to be taken by affected trading partners to reduce the hazard.



3- It is also proposed that the “affected trading partners” be somehow defined, and its related extent be determined in this guideline.

## MEXICO

### PRINCIPLES:

- Paragraph 8. Consider the inclusion of a sub-paragraph that could be placed after d), indicating that the competent authorities should confirm anecdotal information from the communication media, organisations, open population, or other countries, before considering it for taking decisions or making it officially public.
- Paragraph 8, sub-paragraph c. It is suggested specifying in the text that the term “A country” refer to the health authority of a country, and that the term “potentially affected trading partners” refer to the competent authorities in the potentially affected countries.
- Paragraph 8, sub-paragraph e.- In Spanish the term “stakeholders” is translated as “accionistas” (ie, people who have shares or a stake in a company), it is suggested the term “partes involucradas” be used.

### ROLE OF THE COMPETENT AUTHORITY

- Paragraph 19. It is suggested including a text that indicates the responsibility of the competent authorities in confirming anecdotal information from the communication media, organisations, open population, or other countries, before considering it for taking decisions or making it officially public.

Similarly, it is proposed indicating the importance of the appropriate use of the information, including consideration of confidentiality, to avoid the negative effects that may result for the image of a product, brand, company or country.

In the same way, it is important to specify that the information exchanged must only be used as one element in taking decisions for the management of the risks arising from a health emergency.

### STANDARD FORMAT FOR INFORMATION EXCHANGE IN FOOD SAFETY EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

- Number 2, fourth bullet. it is suggested changing the example in parentheses “UPC codes”, with the term “bar code”.

## NEW ZEALAND

The New Zealand Government would like to make the following comments:

### GENERAL COMMENTS

New Zealand notes that the proposed draft revision has been on the agenda of CCFICS for some time and we believe that the draft has now reached a stage where it will provide useful guidance for member governments. New Zealand therefore supports the advancement of the document to the Commission for final adoption at Step 5/8. We do however have a small number of editorial suggestions as set out below.

### SPECIFIC COMMENTS

#### Paragraph 20 and 21

These two paragraphs should be reversed to align with the re-order of the principles in para 8.

#### Paragraph 23

The complete reference for the Code of Ethics for International Trade in Foods (CAC/RCP 20-1979) should be included and a footnote included indicating that the code is currently under review by CCGP.

#### Paragraph 26

The end of first sentence does not work and the intent is captured in the following sentence. We therefore suggest that the words after “*on request*” be deleted.



Annex

The opening paragraph needs to be amended to align with the reworked definition of a “*food safety emergency*”. We suggest adding the words “*where the threat may not be contained/controlled or its extent may be unknown and*” before “*that requires urgent action*”.

**UNITED STATES**

The United States respectfully submits comments to the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems in response to a request for comments on the Proposed Draft Revision to the Codex Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Control Emergency Situations, CX/FICS 03/3.

**General Comments**

The United States expresses its thanks to the Working Group and to Australia for their good work in preparing this revised Paper. We believe this revision to the existing guidance document, CAC/GL 19-1995, will provide substantial additional information that will be helpful to countries and should be progressed in the Codex Step Procedure.

The United States provides the following specific comments for the Committee’s consideration. The United States also notes that there are a number of minor punctuation and other edits that are needed (see attachment).

**Specific Comments**

## SCOPE

Paragraph 4

Insert “radiological” in the list of potential food safety hazards that are in parenthesis since radiological incidents may arise. This insert will also provide consistency with the list of potential hazards given under the “Nature of the food safety emergency” given in Annex 1.

Delete “association has been established” and replace with “credible scientific information suggests a link” so the sentence would read: “...situations where the food safety hazard has not been identified, **but credible scientific information indicates a link** between consumption of a food...”

## PRINCIPLES

Principle “d”

Insert “and other affected parties” after “affected countries” so the principle will read: “...enable potential affected countries **and other affected parties** to make informed risk management decisions”. Parties other than competent authorities, particularly the food industry and consumers, will have to have make certain risk management decisions.

Principle “f”

Insert “to the extent possible” before “Information flow” so the principle will read: “**To the extent possible**, information flow should be transparent...” In certain instances, such as those involved with food security situations, it may be necessary to restrict the flow of information during particular phases of risk analysis.

## NATURE OF THE FOOD SAFETY EMERGENCY

Paragraph 9

Second sentence. For the reason outlined in paragraph 4 above, insert “radiological” in the list of hazards. The sentence would then read: “...microbiological contamination or chemical, physical or **radiological** agents, and the source ...”

Third sentence. Delete the words “the appearance of” so the sentence would read: “Any clear and substantial association between the consumption of a food and serious adverse health effects should be reported by...”.

## INFORMING POTENTIAL AFFECTED TRADING PARTNERS

Paragraph 14

Second sentence. We question whether regular mail is an expedient means of communication, particularly in food safety emergency situations. We suggest placing “,if necessary,” in front of the term, recognizing that there might be instances where regular mail is the only means of communication. The sentence would then read: “Communications by telephone, email, facsimile and, **if necessary**, regular mail should all be considered...”

## INFORMATION TO BE EXCHANGED

Paragraph 16

Item (a). Since the nature of the hazard and the risks identified are associated with, but are different from, the methodology used and assumptions made, we suggest separating these two components of (a) into two separate points. Additionally, for consistency with the Annex, item 1, last paragraph, change “methodology used” to “methods of sampling and analysis” and add “the sampling plan” before this phrase as a sampling plan is different from sampling methods. Item (a) would then read:

- a. The nature of the food safety emergency including the hazards and risks identified.
- a (bis) The **sampling plan, methods of sampling and analysis** and assumptions made.”

Paragraph 18

Second sentence. Delete the words “information exchange in food safety emergency situations” as they are redundant to the wording in the first sentence. The sentence would then read: “A model standard format is provided as Attachment 1.”

Additional paragraph to be added

The United States suggests the insertion of a new paragraph 18 bis as follows to provide for confidentiality requirements that may exist within importing and exporting countries.

- 18 bis. Information exchanged should respect the requirements of the countries involved regarding confidentiality of information.

## ROLE OF THE COMPETENT AUTHORITY

Paragraph 19.

This paragraph contains two separate thoughts, one dealing with communication, and one dealing with verifying the accuracy of scientific information. For clarity, we suggest placing these thoughts into two separate paragraphs, as follows.

19. Upon identification of a food safety emergency, the competent authority identifying the emergency should promptly communicate with and consult the appropriate competent authority/ies of other affected countries. The competent authorities responsible for coordinating the response should update countries receiving the affected food of action taken, as appropriate.

- 19 bis. The competent authority should verify the accuracy of the scientific and related information regarding the nature and extent of the food safety emergency. Any misinformation should be promptly corrected by competent authorities.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Paragraph 23

Move the phrase “that is currently under revision by the Codex Committee on General Principles” to a footnote that can later be removed as a better way of indicating that the work on revising the Codex Code of Ethics is in progress.

Paragraph 26

For clarity, insert the words “managing the” before “international food safety emergency”.

## ANNEX: STANDARD FORMAT FOR INFORMATION EXCHANGE IN FOOD SAFETY SITUATIONS.

Item 1: Nature of the food safety emergency

We suggest the final paragraph to read as follows to be consistent with changes made to paragraph 16.

“In each of the above, notification should include the specific hazard and its level or prevalence based on the available scientific information and, as appropriate, the sampling plan, the methods of sampling and analysis used, and any assumptions made.”

### EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

The European Community congratulates the Working Party for the document on the revision of the CAC/GL 19/1995 and can broadly support it.

At its 23<sup>rd</sup> session, the Commission of the Codex concluded that such a revision was necessary following the intervention of Belgium stressing the disastrous economic repercussions of the dioxin crisis. The lack of precise information on the situation was used to justify the blockage of imports of certain Belgian foodstuffs despite them having no link with the dioxin contamination.

The EC considers that the first objective of the exchange of information in emergencies is to protect the consumer health, but that the secondary expected result is to avoid unjustified measures against food which is not concerned by the emergency.

This is why the European Community insists that the wording of paragraph 4 of the guidelines on the exchange of information in food emergencies (CAC/GL 19-1995) be maintained in the preamble.

In addition and although the drafting group was divided on this point, the European Community continues to believe that a reference should be made to a system of identification of the origin and the destination of food. Such a system of tracing of food is indeed essential to allow the country where the emergency occurs to give all the information necessary for the countries of origin or of destination to be informed in the most precise way possible. Accordingly, the EC suggests adding to paragraph 13 of the draft Directive the following sentence:

*"13. Given the overall nature of food trade, the impact of a food safety emergency may be widespread. The competent authority of the country where the food safety emergency is identified should, to the best of its ability, determine all potential recipient countries of the implicated food (s) and all countries from which the potentially contaminated food or its ingredients was imported. A traceability/ products tracing system should help the competent authorities to trace back the origin and trace forward the destination of the contaminated food or ingredients. All relevant information in relation to the food safety emergency should be provided to the competent authorities of the countries thus identified."*

The European Community considers that the competent authorities should avoid taking risk management measures which are not based on precise and verified information. The EC proposes adding to the third sentence of paragraph 19:

*« The accuracy and the veracity of the scientific and other information regarding food safety emergency should be should be verified before taking risk assessment, risk management and risk communication decision. Any misinformation should be promptly corrected by competent authorities. The European Community would also like to suggest introducing into paragraph 24, concerning the rapid warning system, a reference to the systems for tracing the origin of food which are an essential component of it. The first sentence of paragraph 24 would then read :*

*« 24. A rapid alert system including traceability/product tracing systems can be an important component of a food emergency information exchange system."*

Concerning the list of official contact points for exchange of information referred to in paragraph 12, the EC already agreed that this list should be kept up-to-date. In addition, the EC would also like to provide two comments on these official contact points:

1- The organization in charge of this task is to be determined, but the EC believes that this organization should be of an international dimension and therefore suggests that the word “*international*” be inserted in the brackets.

2- Moreover, the European Community has the experience that having more than one contact point in a country is always confusing when an emergency situation occurs. It would be preferable to have a single contact point for each country independently of the number of competent authorities established in the food control system. For example, in case the competence would be divided between chemical risks and biological risks, the central contact point would have to forward the emergency notification to the relevant national authority which would be afterward in direct contact with the competent authorities of the notifying country. The paragraph 6 of the annex should be accordingly redrafted in order to better reflect this issue. For the same reason also the wording of paragraph 8b under Principles needs some rewording, as well as pp. 11 and 12 under Official Contact Points for Information Exchange.

With these modifications, the European Community can accept the recommendation of the Working Party that the document progresses in the stages of the procedure of the Codex.