The Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed of the European Union (RASFF)

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THE EU RASFF - Introduction

The RASFF

- Was launched in 1979
- « is one of the great success stories of the EU’s integrated approach to food safety, showing the power of communication and collaboration »
- is an indispensable tool for protecting and reassuring European consumers
- provides a swift system of exchange of information between member countries
- coordinates the response actions to food safety threats.»*

*Foreword, Mrs Androulla Vassiliou, European Commissioner for Health in “The RASFF, 30 years of keeping consumers safe”, 2009. Also refer to http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/rapidalert/docs/rasff30_booklet_en.pdf
The EU RASFF

Sharing information

• **Information sharing** is one of the EU’s most important tools to tackle food safety challenges and protect consumers against food safety risks.

• **The swift exchange of information** among RASFF members on food and feed related risks **ensures coherent and simultaneous actions by all RASFF members.**

Also refer to

http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/rapidalert/index_en.htm
The EU RASFF - Membership

- EU Member States
- European Commission (Manager of the system)
- European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)
- Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway (by virtue of the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA))
- EFTA Secretariat (coordinates the input from the EEA countries)
- Switzerland (partial member of RASFF for products of animal origin since 1.1.2009 following Agreement with EU)
- From 1st July 2013, Croatia will become a new RASFF member
The EU RASFF – In practice

Notification

• When a RASFF Member has any information about a serious health risk deriving from food or feed, it must immediately notify the Commission using the RASFF.

• In particular, Members have to notify the Commission if they take measures such as withdrawing or recalling food and feed products from the market in order to protect consumers’ health and if rapid action is required.
The EU RASFF – In practice

Notification template:

• Identification of the product;
• Hazards found;
• Measures taken by the notifying member;
• Traceability information about the product;
• All relevant documents e.g. bills, lists of companies who received the products, analytical reports, etc.
The EU RASFF – In practice

The **Commission**:

• Verifies the information contained in the notification;

• Compiles this information;

• Communicates it straight away to all RASFF members.
The EU RASFF – In practice

RASFF members:

• Will check if they are concerned;

• If the product is on their market, they will be able to trace it using the information provided in the notification;

• They will report their findings to the RASFF and also inform about the measures taken.
The EU RASFF –
Criteria for the notification

The notification criteria are provided in Article 50 of Regulation (EC) No. 178/2002:

Whenever a member of the network has any information relating to the existence of a serious direct or indirect risk to human health deriving from food or feed, this information is immediately notified to the Commission under the RASFF. The Commission immediately transmits this information to the members of the network.
The EU RASFF – In practice

4 Types of Notifications:
1. Alert Notifications
2. Border Rejections
3. Information Notifications
4. RASFF News
Alert Notifications

In cases where:

• Food or feed presenting a serious health risk is on the market and
• Rapid reaction is required;

They are triggered by the

• RASFF member who identifies the problem and
• Who takes the relevant actions (e.g. withdrawal of the product)
Alert Notifications

Goal:

• To give all RASFF members the information to confirm whether the product in question is on their market so that

so that

• They can take the necessary measures.
Border Rejections

In cases where:

• Food or feed consignments **have been tested and rejected** at the external borders of the EU and the EEA **when a health risk has been found**.

• The notifications are sent to all EEA border posts to ensure that the rejected consignment does not re-enter the EU through another border post.
Information Notifications

In cases where:

• A risk has been identified about food or feed on the market

But

• Other Members do not have to take rapid action

Because:

- The product has not reached their market; or
- The product is no longer on their market; or
- The nature of the risk does not require rapid action.
Any information related to the safety of food and feed products but which has not been communicated as an Alert or an Information Notification but which is judged interesting for the control authorities, is transmitted to RASFF members under the heading “News”.

RASFF Annual Report 2012

Also refer to

Main findings:
Total number of notifications in 2012: 8797 (3.9% decrease compared to 2011)

Original notifications: 3’516 (40%)
Follow-up notifications: 5’281 (60%)
## RASFF Annual Report 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hazard</th>
<th>Product category</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>No. of notifications</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aflatoxins</td>
<td>Fruits and vegetables</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
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<td>Nuts, nut products and seeds</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>59</td>
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<td>Feed materials</td>
<td>India</td>
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<td>Migration of Formaldehyde</td>
<td>Food contact materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Migration of Chromium</td>
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<td>Monocrotophos</td>
<td>Fruits and vegetables</td>
<td>India</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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RASFF – Issues related to fraud

Methanol poisoning resulting from the adulteration of spirits in the Czech Republic, 36 fatalities (Sept. 2012): The Czech authorities used the RASFF channel to swiftly inform and update their EU partners on their investigations and the measures taken.
RASFF – Issues related to food fraud

The horsemeat scandal: The Irish food safety authority which originally discovered that some processed foods labelled as 100% beef contained horsemeat, was able to swiftly alert its European partners. The Commission launched a monitoring programme which resulted in over 70 RASFF notifications sent and which led to over 300 follow-up notifications to trace the products and withdraw them from the market.
RASFF – to also cover to food fraud

With the increase in food fraud issues, the Commission envisages to extend the scope of RASFF to the fight against food fraud.

The Commission has prepared a 5 point Action Plan to tackle fraudulent practices. Objective: close the gaps identified in the wake of the horsemeat scandal including setting up a procedure for the rapid exchange of information and alerts in cases which may constitute food fraud.
RASFF – Lessons learned from the 2011 outbreak of Shiga toxin-producing Escherichia coli (STEC) 0104:H4 in sprouted seeds

The Commission prepared a “Commission Staff Working Document” in which areas for improvement and concrete actions for improving the management of food-borne diseases were put forward.

Also refer to
Thank you for your attention!