

Who regulates food products?

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) within the U.S. Department of Agriculture inspects and regulates meat, poultry and processed egg products produced in federally inspected plants. FSIS is responsible for ensuring that these products are safe, wholesome, and accurately labeled. All other food products are regulated by the Department of Health and Human Services' [Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#).

Related Items

[FSIS Directive 8080.1, Recall of Meat and Poultry Products](#) (PDF Only)

What is a food recall?

A food recall is a voluntary action by a manufacturer or distributor to protect the public from products that may cause health problems or possible death. A recall is intended to remove food products from commerce when there is reason to believe the products may be adulterated or misbranded.

Who decides when a recall is necessary?

Recalls are initiated by the manufacturer or distributor of the meat or poultry, sometimes at the request of FSIS. All recalls are voluntary. However, if a company refuses to recall its products, then FSIS has the legal authority to detain and seize those products in commerce.

How are unsafe products discovered?

There are four, primary means by which unsafe or improperly labeled meat and poultry products come to the attention of FSIS:

- The company that manufactured or distributed the food informs FSIS of the potential hazard;
- Test results received by FSIS as part of its sampling program indicate that the products are adulterated, or, in some situations, misbranded;
- FSIS field inspectors and program investigators, in the course of their routine duties, discover unsafe or improperly labeled foods; and
- Epidemiological data submitted by State or local public health departments, or other Federal agencies, such as the [Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#) or the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) reveal unsafe, unwholesome or inaccurately labeled food.

As soon as FSIS learns that a potentially unsafe or mislabeled meat or poultry product is in commerce, the Agency conducts a preliminary investigation to determine whether there is a need for a recall.

What occurs during a preliminary investigation?

The preliminary investigation may include some or all of the following steps:

- Contacting the manufacturer of the food for more information;
- Interviewing any consumers who allegedly became ill or injured from eating the suspect food;
- Collecting and analyzing food samples;
- Collecting and verifying information about the suspected food;
- Discussions with FSIS field inspection and compliance personnel;
- Contacting State and local health departments; and
- Documenting a chronology of events.

How does FSIS notify the public when a product is recalled?

FSIS notifies the public through a press release for Class I and Class II recalls, and a Recall Notification Report (RNR) for Class III recalls. (The RNR provides substantially the same information as the press release; however, the format is different.) The press release

is issued to media outlets in the areas where the product was distributed, and is also distributed through an email listserv.

The press release or RNR is posted on the FSIS Web site. When possible, FSIS also includes pictures of the recalled product as part of the online recall press release. Recall press releases and RNRs are posted on the FSIS Recalls area of the Web site, at www.fsis.usda.gov/Fsis_Recalls/Open_Federal_Cases/index.asp.

The public can request to receive FSIS press releases and recall announcements by subscribing to the Agency's email subscription service. For more information or to subscribe, go to www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/Email_Subscription/index.asp. FSIS' newsletters, including the Constituent Update, are also available via email subscription at www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/Newsletters/index.asp.

If the recalled product was purchased by USDA and distributed through a food distribution program, such as the National School Lunch Program, FSIS notifies the Federal agency responsible for the food program, and that agency will hold the product.

What is FSIS' role during a recall?

When there is reason to believe that adulterated or misbranded product has entered commerce, the FSIS Recall Management Division convenes the Recall Committee, a standing committee within FSIS. The Committee, consisting of FSIS scientists, technical experts, field inspection managers, enforcement personnel and communications specialists, evaluates all available information and then makes recommendations to the company about the need for a recall.

If the Recall Committee recommends a recall, the Committee classifies the recall based on the relative health risk, as follows:

- **Class I** - A Class I recall involves a health hazard situation in which there is a *reasonable* probability that eating the food will cause health problems or death.
- **Class II** - A Class II recall involves a potential health hazard situation in which there is a *remote* probability of adverse health consequences from eating the food.
- **Class III** - A Class III recall involves a situation in which eating the food will not cause adverse health consequences.

In addition to determining the class of the recall, the Recall Committee verifies that the company has identified production and distribution information to facilitate the recall.

The Recall Committee advises the company of its recommendation and also provides an opportunity for the firm to offer any information it wishes FSIS to consider regarding the recall after completing its investigation.

How does FSIS ensure that a recall is effective?

FSIS field enforcement personnel conduct "effectiveness checks" to ensure that the recalling firm makes all reasonable efforts to notify the consignees of the recalled product that there is a need to remove the product from commerce. FSIS conducts a sufficient number of effectiveness checks to verify that the recalling firm is contacting its consignees.

If FSIS determines that the recalling firm has contacted its consignees, or has made all reasonable efforts to do so, the Agency notifies the firm that the recall is complete and no further action is expected.

Does FSIS keep documentation on recalls?

The Recall Management Division maintains comprehensive case files for all recalls coordinated by FSIS. Information on open and closed Federal cases can be found on the FSIS Web site at www.fsis.usda.gov/Fsis_Recalls/index.asp.

Where else can consumers find information on recalls?

For additional information on recalls of food and other products, consumers may receive information from the following:

- The USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at: 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854); or via email at: mph hotline.fsis@usda.gov;
- Via email subscription on the FSIS homepage, or from www.govdocs.com/service/multi_subscribe.html?code=USFSIS; and
- For information on all government recalls, go to www.recalls.gov.

In addition, for general recall information as well as food safety information, see "Ask Karen," the FSIS virtual representative, at: www.fsis.usda.gov/Food_Safety_Education/Ask_Karen/index.asp#Question.

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