

**Minnesota Department of Agriculture
Food and Feed Safety Division**

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Version #: 2	Effective Date: 1/27/2017
Title: Communication with the Public SOP	

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1. PURPOSE

The document describes the procedures used by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) Food and Feed Safety Division (FFSD) staff for development and dissemination of notifications and other communications to the public.

2. SCOPE

The procedure applies to all FFSD communications to the public that are necessary regarding public health hazards that are identified in FFSD regulated systems, facilities or products with distribution at a retail/consumer level. This document is not intended to describe procedures for communication with the public on a routine or educational basis, such as the dissemination of factsheets or training announcements.

3. BACKGROUND

Identification of hazards to public health in retail products can occur through different means, including but not limited to, illness outbreak investigations, facility inspections, and surveillance sampling. Timely communication of information relating to identified products that are known to be or may be of concern to public health is essential to prevent further harm to humans and/or animals. These communications need to be clear, complete and be adequately distributed to the potential at-risk populations for maximum effectiveness. Public notifications include information necessary for consumers to prevent illness or injury by avoiding purchase and consumption of adulterated, potentially adulterated, or mislabeled products.

4. RESPONSIBILITY

Division Director – The Division Director receives notification of all communications with the public prior to issuance. The Division Director provides guidance and subject matter expertise as it pertains to the public communication.

Communications Director – The MDA Communications Director drafts all communications to the public from pertinent information supplied by the Rapid Response Team, and begins circulation for the review, editing and approval process. The Communications Director also completes public dissemination through applicable media outlets.

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Rapid Response Team (RRT) Coordinator – In the event of an MDA-identified hazardous product, the RRT Coordinator assembles and communicates the pertinent information relating to RRT activities and health hazard being investigated to the Communications Director, reviews all communications to the public, and issues approval for those communications in coordination with the Response, Training, and Outreach (RTO) Supervisor. The RRT Coordinator will also work closely with the affected program’s manager to assemble and approve communication.

Rapid Response Team (RRT) Investigator/Analyst – In the event of an MDA-identified hazardous product, the RRT Investigator/Analyst assists in the assembly and communication of pertinent information relating to RRT activities and health hazard being investigated to the Communications Director, and the review of communications with the public.

Response, Training and Outreach (RTO) Supervisor – The RTO Supervisor reviews all communications to the public and issues approval for those communications.

FFSD Program Management and Supervisory Staff – Program Management and Supervisory Staff will provide guidance and subject matter expertise in the development of public communications.

5. DEFINITIONS

Affected Program Manager/Supervisor – Program Management or Supervisory Staff overseeing a facility with which the program must communicate. These staff may be part of MDA or a Delegated Agency.

Consumer Advisory – A statement issued to give advice, recommendations or a warning to consumers.

Media Communications – For the purposes of this SOP, media communications can include any of the following avenues of communication: MDA GovDelivery, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, MDA website main page, individual media outlet contact, press release, press availability, press conference call, or press conference.

Public Communications – Communications which are designed to provide information to those external from related industries and regulatory agencies.

Retail Distributed Product – Products that are provided through sale, storage or other methods of distribution directly to those who are intended to prepare, consume and/or use them.

6. PROCEDURES

6.1. RRT Coordinator

6.1.1. Review product information for product identified that presents a hazard to the public. The food or feed product may be identified by MDA, a food or feed company, or a regulatory agency other than MDA (FDA, USDA, state partner). If the hazardous product was identified by someone other than MDA, proceed to 6.1.2. If MDA identified the product, proceed to 6.1.5.

6.1.2. Determine if the non-MDA entity issued a media release. If no media release was issued, proceed to 6.1.5. If a media release was issued, proceed to 6.1.3.

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- 6.1.3.** Determine if the message issued was clear and complete. A clear, complete message includes sufficient information so a consumer can clearly identify the product (includes name of product, package size(s), Best By or Use By dates, etc.), the reason for the advisory (improperly labeled, potentially contains biological, chemical, or physical hazards, etc.), and any actions the consumer should take in response (return to purchase location, immediately discard product, etc.). If the message was not clear and/or complete, proceed to 6.1.5. If the message was clear and complete, proceed to 6.1.4.
- 6.1.4.** Determine if the media coverage of the product was adequate for the situation. A message with adequate coverage is defined as one that MDA determines has satisfactorily reached the audience of concern. Coverage will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. A message may reach the audience of concern through several methods, including online or print newspaper coverage, web or social media posting (websites, Facebook, Twitter, etc.), television or radio coverage, a posted notification at potential locations of purchase, and/or notification from the location of purchase (via phone, email or letter). Dependent on the product of concern and the audience (e.g. club store shoppers, students, pregnant women, elderly, etc.) some methods of delivery may be more appropriate than others. If not adequate, proceed to 6.1.5. If the media coverage was adequate, no further action is necessary.
- 6.1.5.** Determine the risk to Minnesota consumers from the retail distributed product. The determination should be made using information from food distribution product tracing activities, epidemiological investigations, laboratory-confirmed sample results, and food facility investigations. Additional considerations include: the type of hazard identified, the extent of the event, illness cases identified in Minnesota, and affected company or distribution chains located in Minnesota.
- 6.1.6.** In coordination with the affected company's or agency's Program Manager/Supervisor, assemble all pertinent information and select appropriate media communication options based on the risk to Minnesota consumers. Note that data collected by or on behalf of FDA is protected data and is not releasable to the public. Pertinent public notification information may include, but is not limited to:
- a) Product name and brand
 - b) Product description
 - c) Package size
 - d) Description of packaging or product photo(s)
 - e) Reason for notification
 - f) Product distribution list
 - g) Consumer instructions for return or disposal of product
 - h) Description of symptoms associated with the pathogen or allergen of concern
 - i) Number of cases identified in Minnesota
 - j) Method by which the issue was discovered

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k) Appropriate media and consumer contacts

6.1.7. Email information identified in 6.1.6 to the Communications Director, along with names of additional staff to include for the review of the media release.

6.1.8. Schedule and hold a meeting with affected company's or agency's Program Manager, Division Director, additional MDA staff, and affected firm staff (if appropriate) to review the draft media release for clarity and completeness. If no edits are necessary, skip to 6.1.10. If edits are identified by those reviewing the draft, continue to 6.1.9.

6.1.9. Submit all edits to the Communications Director by email, with all other reviewers copied.

6.1.10. In coordination with the affected Program Manager, Division Director, and all other identified reviewers, submit approval of the draft media release to the Communications Director as soon as possible.

6.2. RRT Investigator/Analyst

6.2.1. Assist RRT Coordinator with procedures outlined in sections 6.1.1 through 6.1.10.

6.2.2. Maintain all consumer advisories and media releases on the RRT SharePoint site.

6.3. RTO Supervisor

6.3.1. If applicable, advise RRT Coordinator with determination if the non-MDA entity's message issued was clear and complete or if the media coverage of the product was adequate for the situation.

6.3.2. Provide guidance to the RRT Coordinator to determine the risk to Minnesota consumers from the retail distributed product and the appropriate media communication options.

6.3.3. Attend meeting to review the draft media release for clarity and completeness.

6.3.4. Review and approve the final draft media press release.

6.4. FFSD Management and Supervisory Staff

6.4.1. If applicable, advise RRT Coordinator with determination if the non-MDA entity's message issued was clear and complete or if the media coverage of the product was adequate for the situation.

6.4.2. Provide guidance to the RRT Coordinator to determine the risk to Minnesota consumers from the retail distributed product and the appropriate media communication options.

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6.4.3. Attend meeting to review the draft media release for clarity and completeness.

6.4.4. Review and approve the final draft media press release.

6.5. Communications Director

6.5.1. Draft the media release using pertinent information supplied by the RRT Coordinator.

6.5.2. Email draft to the RRT Coordinator and all other staff identified by the RRT Coordinator for review. In certain circumstances, the draft press release may also be shared with the affected firm for review for accuracy.

6.5.3. Revise the draft media release to incorporate edits proposed by the reviewer(s).

6.5.4. After approval of the final draft by all reviewers, proceed with normal procedures for the media release.

7. RELATED DOCUMENTS (includes References, Attachments)

MDA Media Release Decision Tree

8. EQUIPMENT/MATERIALS NEEDED

N/A

9. SAFETY

N/A

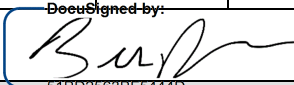
10. CIRCULATION

This policy will be circulated to the following individuals: FFSD Director, FFSD Program Managers, FFSD Program Supervisors, RRT Staff, and the MDA Communications Director. The current version will be stored electronically on the FFSD document control site.

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11. APPROVAL/DOCUMENT HISTORY

Document History		
Version #	Status (I, R)	Change History
1	I	Previous version FOOD.50.06 – Communication with the Public SOP transferred to Response (RESP) and updating responsibilities of the RRT Coordinator. Updates also made due to division structure changes from DFID to FFSD.
1.1	R	Communications Coordinator role updated to Communications Director.
2	R	Addition of criteria for determining if media releases and media coverage is adequate under Section 6.1.
DocuSigned by: 		1/27/2017
Approved By: <small>51BD2563BF5444D...</small>		Date
Approved By:		Date

I = Initial document; R = Revised document