

Collaborative Food Safety Forum (CFSF)

Enhancing Early Outbreak Investigations— Draft Supply Chain Consultation Process Guide

This document is a brief description and guide to the Supply Chain Consultation Process** developed during the Collaborative Food Safety Forum (CFSF), hosted by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and involving CDC, FDA, USDA, industry and consumer groups. This consultation process is intended to expedite foodborne outbreak investigations by providing a mechanism for industry to share information with federal government Agencies. All participants acknowledge that trust is critical to this process and are mindful that both speed and accuracy are required to achieve the primary goal of improving public health.

Initiation of the Consultation Process

The process will be initiated early in an investigation when the agencies have 2-3 plausible hypotheses but need additional information quickly, particularly supply chain related data, to narrow the possibilities. Typically prompted by CDC given that it will be early in the investigation, the Agencies will coordinate among one another to decide if and when initiating a consultation would be useful. If there is disagreement, the decision will be made at the Interagency Foodborne Outbreak Response (IFOR) level. The consultation process does not replace current, ongoing agency communication with subject matter experts. Rather, it augments those conversations with a more standardized outreach process that has clear protocols and is able to be adapted to the unique traits of the different outbreaks. The standing industry group is initially comprised of industry representative who took part in the development of the process during CFSF deliberations (contact information below).

The Consultation(s)

The lead agency identified during the decision to initiate a consultation will provide logistics to participants. Agency staff will select from the industry list for a preliminary call. During the Consultation call, the Agencies will provide relevant information on the outbreak (including preliminary hypotheses) and questions about supply chain information that would aid the investigation. Industry participants are expected to provide insights on the supply chain, pose additional or modified questions, and either confirm or suggest alternative hypotheses. The information provided and discussed either during or after the call will be confidential and only shared among the Agencies involved in the investigation.

During the outbreak investigation, the individual consultation sessions will be iterative if necessary. As the investigation continues, the Agencies may need to call additional sessions to continue narrowing the plausible hypotheses. The information needs will become more specific and the participant selection will reflect the more focused hypotheses. The standing industry group may suggest additional industry participants given the nature of the outbreak. They will notify the lead agency of the request for an additional industry

participant and will be responsible for briefing any new participants on the process and expectations.

Process Conclusion

Once the Agencies can either determine a source or industry information can no longer speed the investigation, the consultation process is complete. Agencies will maintain a distinct line between the investigation process and regulatory processes. Agencies will notify industry of the conclusion of the process and conduct debrief sessions regarding the operation of the process and its effectiveness in speeding the investigation. These sessions will include 1) a debrief among the Agencies, and 2) a debrief with the Agencies and the industry representatives involved in the consultation process. These debriefs will contribute to more thorough review of the lessons learned from major outbreaks and their root causes. This information will be disseminated, along with corrective actions or improved preventive control strategies, to relevant industry. Additional communication with stakeholders not directly involved in the consultation process, including other public health officials, industry peers, members of academia, and the public, is important for engendering trust in this process. Industry and Agency staff should be transparent about the use of the process when describing outbreak investigations, including evaluation of the public health benefits.

Industry Contact Info

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***This document is for use during the testing period over the next six months, during which the consultation process will be tried and evaluated. The Collaborative Food Safety Forum will hold a conference call in September 2013 to debrief, discuss, and refine the process based on the interim experiences. A more detailed document describing the consultation process and the principles underlying it can be found at <http://www.resolve.org/site-foodsafety/>. RESOLVE is the facilitator for the Collaborative Food Safety Forum.*