European Food Safety Authority

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Videoconference Update

As part of its mandate, EFSA is establishing a videoconferencing network between National Agencies, the EFSA and the Commission. The goal of this videoconferencing network is to facilitate communication among senior staff, especially in situations of emerging food risk.

EFSA made good progress with the *Equipment* and the *Service* part of the project. The *Network* part is still in process and must be concluded before useful and efficient videoconferences can be established.

- **Equipment**. EFSA ordered 20 Polycom VSX3000 and related support through a framework contract established with a UK vendor, *Internet Videocommunications*.

  19 sets are provided free of charge to National Agencies (Austria, Belgium Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, and The Netherlands), and 1 to EFSA Executive Director.

  These 20 sets should be delivered in their respective countries by the end of January. Internet Videocommunications provides telephone assistance for equipment installation and configuration, as well as a videoconference tutorial. Please note that while the sets remain legally the property of EFSA, their custody will be transferred to individual national agencies.

  Since 9 National Agencies already had videoconference sets, this part of the videoconference project will be completed in the first part of February 2005.

- **Service.** EFSA entered an agreement with *British Telecom* for all services related to videoconference. EFSA will incur all costs related to the service usage, including telecommunication charges (the offer is limited to issues involving food safety between National Agencies, the EFSA and the Commission. National Agencies may use the service for other purposes at their own cost). The service includes:

  o Implement the most appropriate visualization scheme, depending on the number of participants

  o Dial out, greet and guide participants throughout the videoconference

- o Provide an audio conference backup for those National Agencies that failed to connect satisfactorily through videoconference
- o Manage participant questions and answers.
- o Allow participants to view a slide presentation and to update collaboratively working documents.

- **Network Connection**. Currently, 2 technologies are used for enabling videoconferences: "IP" and "ISDN":
  - o "IP" is a newer and cheaper alternative but its reliance on the Internet makes the quality of a pan-European videoconference unpredictable (jitters, loss of sound and image, echo are possible). All National Agencies already have "IP".
  - o "ISDN" is an older and more expensive alternative. However, this technology guarantees the quality of a videoconference (excellent sound, image and motion quality). About 15 National Agencies already have "ISDN".

  Therefore, EFSA recommends that all National Agencies get ISDN lines. Because ISDN lines are quite often provided by local telecommunication Providers, EFSA proposes the following next steps:
  - o National Agencies order ISDN lines. All set-up costs and monthly fees should be incurred by the National Agencies. Prices vary widely across Europe; set-up costs range between 40€and 250€per line and monthly fees range between 5€and 40€per line. A service agreement should be established between the local telecommunication Provider by the National Agencies.
  - o Whenever a videoconference occurs, EFSA covers the ISDN line usage cost (about 4€per minute, per site). This offer is limited to videoconferences covering food safety issues between national agencies, EFSA and the Commission. National Agencies are free to use the ISDN lines and the videoconference equipment for other purposes at their own cost.

Next Steps

1. Monday 17 January 2005. EFSA organizes a webconference with members of the Working Group IT. BT and the videoconference equipment vendor, Internet Videocommunications will present their services and will answer questions that participants may have.

2. Wednesday 26 January. Test videoconference with National Agencies that have equipment. Other tests are scheduled for Wednesday 02 March 2005 and Wednesday 30 March 2005.

3. Mid-April 2005. The videoconference network should be available for full use by National Agencies, EFSA and the Commission.

Extranet Update

The Advisory forum experimental Extranet was made available on July 20 to all members of the Advisory Forum including the Communication and IT Working Group (http://afnetwork.efsa.eu.int/portal/efsa.pt)

Users of the experimental Extranet are attached to focused communities such as the Advisory Forum community or the Communication and IT Working group communities. So far, about 120 users regularly utilize the Extranet, including all members of the IT and the Communication Working Groups. The experimental Extranet is mostly used for:

- Sharing/downloading documents, such as project plans, meeting minutes and presentations
- discussing meeting agenda and project documents
- Registering to meetings
- responding to online surveys such as the videoconference equipment survey

A Project Steering Committee (PSC), comprised of senior users from the Communication and IT Working group communities, EFSA and the Commission was created. The role of the PSC is to provide the overall direction and management of the Extranet. The PSC makes sure that that:

- The Extranet project remains on course
- The Extranet project delivers according to the business cases
- The Extranet project delivers products of the required quality

The PSC should meet every 3 weeks by audio or videoconference and regularly provide a progress report to the Advisory Forum.

Next Steps

1. The first official release of the Extranet was due at the end of March 2005. Unfortunately, due to procurement issues, this step of the project should be delayed by about 2 months. The official release of the Extranet is now scheduled for end May 2005. In the mean time, the Experimental Extranet will remain available, unchanged.
2. Organize the first PSC meeting in the first half of February 2005.
3. Complete the procurement procedure by end March 2005