

HORIZON SCANNING TO IDENTIFY EMERGING FOOD SAFETY RISKS

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The strategy for networking and cooperation agreed by the Advisory Forum in December and subsequently endorsed by the Management Board could be the basis for a number of potential projects for cooperation. The projects identified included horizon scanning to identify and manage emerging risks.
2. Member States are frequently faced with the need to manage food incidents varying in complexity from small localised events to those involving multiple product recalls. Food incidents undermine consumer confidence in food safety, they are costly to national economies and contribute to an erosion of trust between consumers, regulators, and the food industry. Responding to these incidents can be very time consuming both for risk assessors and risk managers. It is clearly in everyones interest to address the underlying causes of food incidents.
3. The ability to anticipate new threats to food safety is a key element in enhancing the way the food industry and official bodies are able to prevent incidents or react quickly to them if they do occur. Several high profile incidents, such as illegal veterinary medicine residues in shellfish and poultry; Sudan dyes in chilli powder; benzene in soft drinks; and ITX migrating from food cartons have illustrated the need to develop early warning mechanisms to alert food authorities and the food industry to potential problems.
4. As a first step the UK Food Standards Agency will be hosting an international workshop, organised in cooperation with EFSA, on food incident prevention and horizon scanning to identify future threats to food safety. The workshop will be held in London on 5-6 March. Invitations to attend the workshop have already been sent to members of the Advisory Forum.

II. AIMS OF THE WORKSHOP

5. The workshop is seeking to build on existing initiatives, including the EMRISK project to identify areas of research that will enable risk managers to respond quickly and effectively to emerging food safety issues.
6. This workshop will address how mechanisms can be developed to usefully utilise available information and sources of expertise in a way that tracks changes in technology, business practices and international experiences.

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7. The workshop, will include speakers from Food Standards Australia New Zealand, Health Canada, the US Food and Drug Administration, and the World Health Organisation to provide an overview of related initiatives around the world.
8. The format for the second day of the workshop has been designed to enable food authorities and representatives from the food industry to work together to identify promising areas for research that will help identify emerging food safety issues and also how we can help prevent food incidents in future.
9. We would very much welcome an active contribution from all Member States at the workshop.

III. OUTPUT

10. The intention is that the workshop will produce a list of recommendations for future research on horizon scanning to identify emerging food safety risks and ways of preventing food incidents. Such recommendations would complement work being taken within the SAFEFOODERA project (www.safefoodera.net).
11. The output from the workshop will also be a first step towards collaborative working on the horizon scanning project identified in the EFSA strategy for scientific cooperation and networking.