



Associate Parliamentary Food and Health Forum - 'Food Scares'

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Food Standards Agency



Food Standards Agency

- Set up in April 2000 as a result of several 'food scares'
- Separated from Government Department responsible for the food industry



The main objective of the FSA

“....to protect public health from risks which may arise in connection with the consumption of food (including risks caused by the way in which it is produced or supplied) and otherwise to protect the interests of consumers in relation to food.”



How we work

- Take a precautionary approach
- Put the consumer first
- Make decisions and take action in proportion to the evidence base
- Act quickly when we need to
- Are consistent in our approach
- Are open and transparent



Consumer perception of food safety

- Food safety is not high on most consumers' list of concerns
- But it can soon be a priority in a food scare
- People want a trusted source
- Ambivalent to the food industry
- Tendency to trust experts



Illegal dyes - Background

- Sudan I - red dye used in petrol, shoe and furniture polishes.
- Para red - used in printing
- Added illegally to spices to enhance colour
- Genotoxic carcinogens
- First Sudan incident - 2003



Control at EC level

- Controls on Sudan I in chilli powder imports - June 2003
- Curry powder included, plus testing for Sudan II-IV - January 2004
- Controls to cover palm oil and turmeric - May 2005



Recent Incident - Sudan I

- Contaminated chilli powder used in manufacture of Worcester sauce
- Distribution chain was highly complex
- Information management demanding - national & international stakeholders, public, media



Risk Assessment - UK

- Shown to cause cancer in animal studies
- View of independent scientific committees - risk is low but not possible to establish a safe limit
- Presence in food not acceptable at any level



Risk management

- Responsibility with Member States
- UK (+ other MS) removed products from market and inform consumers
- Other MS - trade withdrawal of directly contaminated products only



Dioxins

- Widespread environmental pollutants
- Cause toxic effects
- Non-genotoxic carcinogens
- FSA surveys to identify areas of uncertainty and refine risk assessment



New warning over poisons in farmed salmon

Eat fish only three times a year, warns study



FSA Position

- Identified levels of fish consumption with benefits, but without undue risks
- Most people eat little fish, some eat more than two portions per week
- Two separate guidelines



Latest developments

- EFSA risk assessment
- Working group to harmonise testing methods
- Commission to propose harmonised risk management options
- External FSA review to identify lessons learnt
- Task force on incidents in UK - strengthen controls in the food chain



Thank you

