EFFECTIVE FOOD RISK COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY FROM THE HELLENIC FOOD AUTHORITY

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Regulation 178/2002 – Definition of risk communication

the interactive exchange of information and opinions throughout the risk analysis process as regards

- hazards and risks,
- risk-related factors and
- risk perceptions,

among risk assessors, risk managers, consumers, feed and food businesses, the academic community and other interested parties,

including the explanation of risk assessment findings and the basis of risk management decisions
Challenges in risk communication

• Lack of understanding of the scientific process and results
• Different explanations for the same technical word
• Lack of uniform scientific advice
• The media
• Differences in receptivity
• Differences in perception of risk
Map: 1.1 – Top concerns in Member States

Source: Special Eurobarometer 354 2010
QF 1.6. To what extent do you associate food and eating with each of the following?

Being concerned about the safety of food

[Bar chart showing the percentage of respondents in different countries indicating how much they associate food and eating with being concerned about the safety of food. The chart includes data for various countries, with bars color-coded to represent different levels of association: To a large extent, Somewhat, Not very much, Not at all, and Don't know.]
Degree of confidence of Greek / European (EU-27) consumers in the various sources of information on food risks – Eurobarometer, 2010
# Degree of confidence of Greek / European (EU-27) consumers in the various sources of information on food risks – Eurobarometer, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public authorities in the EU should do more to ensure that food is healthy</td>
<td>EE27  85%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GR    91%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public authorities in the EU do a good job to inform people about the risks associated with food</td>
<td>EE27  56%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GR    52%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific advice on the food risks are independent of commercial or political interests</td>
<td>EE27  47%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GR    42%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public authorities in the EU react immediately when it is identified a risk to consumer health</td>
<td>EE27  63%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GR    61%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The role of EFET in risk/food incidents communication

- Strengthening the scientific collaboration through exchange of scientific information on risk assessment (FP EFSA)
- Public consultations
- Leaflets/guidance to consumers
- Salt reduction campaign
- Food incidents communication
A case study of 2011

*Escherichia coli* in beef hamburger patties
6 cases of HUS (haemolytic uremic syndrome) recorded in north France.

Children aged between 20 months and 8 years old with symptoms of hemorrhagic diarrhea at the period during 6 and 11 June, were hospitalised.

The incidents were attributed to the consumption of beef hamburger patties bought from 3 stores in north France.
Regional services of EFET informed inspectors of EFET took samples of:

- minced beef, frozen
- spicy minced beef preparations frozen

The samples were sent to the Central Public Health Laboratory for analysis.
The analyses of the samples at the Central Public Health Laboratory indicated the presence of *Escherichia coli*:

1. Serotype O-157

2. ??? Genes eae (intimin) genes VT1/VT2, serotype with regards to the flagellar antigen H- ???

01/07

EFET needed to decide very quickly regarding the products affected

- Detention?
- Withdrawal?
- Recall?
- Destruction?
- Other?

having as sole factual evidence the presence of *E. coli* O157:?
The analyses of the samples at the Central Public Health Laboratory indicated the presence of *Escherichia coli*:

- Serotype O-157
- Gene eae A for intimin production detected (+)
- Gene for VT1 (verotoxin) production not detected (-)
- Gene for VT2 (verotoxin) production not detected (-)
- Serotype with regards to the flagellar antigen H- (-)
06/07/2011: Scientific support from EFET’s Scientific Council (ESET) regarding the risk assessment of the products where *E. coli* O157 was detected

11/07/2011: Products made from minced beef infected by the pathogen *Escherichia coli* O157 are a risk factor for public health

14/07/2011: Information to the public
More than half (51.7%) of the reported confirmed human VTEC infections in 2009 were associated with the O157 serogroup (Table VT3). As in previous years, the majority of O157-associated confirmed cases (79.8%) were reported by the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Table VT3. Reported confirmed VTEC cases in humans by serogroup (top 10), 2008-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serogroup</th>
<th>No of cases</th>
<th>% total</th>
<th>Serogroup</th>
<th>No of cases</th>
<th>% total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O157</td>
<td>1,848</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>O157</td>
<td>1,673</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT¹</td>
<td>1,008</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>NT</td>
<td>819</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O26</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>O26</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O103</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
<td>O103</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O91</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
<td>O91</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O145</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
<td>O145</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O146</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td>O146</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O128</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td>O128</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O111</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>O111</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O113</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>O113</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other²</td>
<td>244</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,573</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,573</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure VT1. Haemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS) by age and serogroup in reporting MSs, 2009

Source: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Netherlands, Slovenia, Sweden, United Kingdom (N=242).
•Literature describes, amongst others, *E. coli* O157 strains isolated from patients with diarrhea and patients with aemolytic uremic syndrome that were positive for the intimin gene (*eae +*) **BUT** were lacking both *stx* genes (Schmidt et al., 1999; Friedrich et al., 2007).

•According to researchers, although *stx-/eae+* *E. coli* O157 strains seem to cause milder illness in comparison to the *stx+* strains, they **SHOULD BE considered as pathogens** since the can cause diarrhea and epidemics to humans (Frierich et al., 2007) and thus

•**Constitute a risk factor for public health.**
Αθήνα 23 Αυγούστου 2011

ΔΕΛΤΙΟ ΤΥΠΟΥ

Κατάσχεση – καταστροφή 2.481 κιλών κατεψυγμένων προϊόντων
από τον ΕΦΕΤ

Μετά τους ελέγχους του ΕΦΕΤ (Περιφερειακή Διεύθυνση Ανατολικής Μακεδονίας & Θράκης) και την
dιαπίστωση της διακίνησης a) κατεψυγμένων προϊόντων κιμά από βοδινό κρέας (αριθμός παρτίδας
L91185010 και ημερομηνία λήξης 6-11-2011) και b) κατεψυγμένου πικάντικου προϊόντος κιμά
What were the challenges?

- The food crisis on *E. coli* in sprouts was still in progress (21/05/2011- 26/07/2011)
- Increased pressure and interest of the media
- Increased worry of public/consumers and inform the public about the health risk
- The subject was continuously criticized by the media
- Was always on the front news for quite a long period
- The message changing with new knowledge
- The flow of information was criticised by the media, and concerned FBO.
Answer given by Mr Dalli on behalf of the Commission

The Commission was informed of the finding of E. coli O157 on frozen minced beef from a supermarket in Greece through its Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF). Laboratory analyses have been carried out and exclude that this is the same strain that caused recently a major outbreak in Germany and France.

Regulation (EC) 853/2004 on the hygiene of foodstuffs requires food business operators to put in place, implement and maintain a permanent procedure or procedures based on the application of hazard analysis and critical control point principles. Virulent strains of E.coli are considered as a hazard for minced beef and must therefore be monitored by all food business operators along the production and distribution chain.

Competent authorities are responsible for the verification of this implementation e.g. by official sampling and analyses. It is up to the authorities to decide on how many and where samples are taken respecting a risk-based approach.

The Commission regularly checks the effectiveness of national authorities' control systems by inspections of the Commission's Food and Veterinary Office.

Neither these inspections nor other sources of information provide any ground to suspect insufficient quality of food safety controls by the.................
Communication during the management of the incident

- Daily briefing RM team internally
- Communication with laboratories, regional services of EFET, other competent authorities (KEELPNO)
- Daily communication by email or phone
- Communication with the FBO
- Communication with EC and other MS
Communication within the Scientific Council

- Teleconference
- Exchange of info
- Drafting the scientific opinion

Informing consumers/media

- Daily press releases
- Use of the website of EFET
- Interviews at the media
Crisis Communications Guidelines of EFSA
CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS GUIDELINES

E-publication launched in March, available here

Best practice for crisis communicators

How to communicate during food or feed safety incidents

1.5. When should these recommendations be used?

- Before an incident arises: read the recommendations and decide which elements are applicable or add value for your own organisation, and integrate them into your procedures. The recommendations include suggestions for pre-incident communications planning, which you may wish to adopt for your organisation. Use these recommendations also during crisis training exercises to help familiarise yourself fully with them.

- During an incident: use the recommendations to help your organisation follow best practice when communicating with external audiences. Use this document as a reference tool to clarify the respective roles of EFSA and Member States regarding external communications during and after an event.

Live incident or crisis communications checklist – a quick reference guide

Use this table as your checklist during a crisis situation. You can use it by your own team and brach to be carried out.
Basic Principles

Communicate quickly to protect human health

Take control of communicating about the situation – even if facts are still unknown

Identify who you need to communicate with and how you will reach them

Be clear and transparent

Collaborate – remember crises don’t stop at international borders

Never underestimate
When a dog bites a man, that is not news, because it happens so often.

But if a man bites a dog, that is news

Alfred Harmsworth (1865–1922)
John B. Bogart (1848–1921)
Thank you for your attention

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