

NON-MEMBER COUNTRIES

If a risk is identified in a food or feed product that came from or was exported to a non-RASFF member, the European Commission informs the country in question. In this way, it can take corrective measures and thus avoid the same problem in the future. For example, it may remove a business from the list of approved companies that fully comply with EU legislation requirements and are allowed to export to the EU.

When the guarantees received are not sufficient or when immediate measures are required, a decision can be made to take measures such as prohibition of import or systematic control at the EU borders.



INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

In addition, the European Commission and RASFF work with the World Health Organization (WHO) alert system called the 'International Food Safety Authorities Network' (INFOSAN). This network comprises contacts, or national focal points, in over 160 member countries that receive information from the WHO in the form of INFOSAN notes about food safety issues and disseminate it to all relevant ministries in their respective country. RASFF works with INFOSAN and the two share information on a case-by-case basis.

RASFF AT WORK: AN EXAMPLE

During routine monitoring by the Irish authorities of the food chain for a range of contaminants in late 2008, very high levels of dioxins – about 100 times the EU maximum level – were found in pig meat originating in Ireland. Investigations immediately started to determine the dioxin levels and to identify the possible source of contamination. Dioxins have no immediate effect on people's health but can cause problems if they are absorbed into their bodies at high levels for long periods.

The Irish contact point informed the European Commission through RASFF on 5 December 2008 of the contamination incident. The Commission sent out an alert notification to all members. The use of contaminated bread crumbs produced from bakery waste was identified as the source and evidence indicated that the contamination problem was likely to have started in September 2008. The Irish authorities took no chance and initiated a comprehensive recall of all Irish pork produced since 1 September 2008.

In less than two weeks more than 100 follow-up messages were received tracing the products – from raw meat to processed products containing Irish pork as one of many ingredients – involving as many as 54 countries among which 27 were RASFF member countries. Thanks to RASFF, these countries were able to take immediate action and to trace and recall pork and processed products that were possibly contaminated with dioxins before they were consumed.



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FIND OUT MORE AT:
<http://ec.europa.eu/rasff>



Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed

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INTRODUCTION

It is no surprise that consumers want to be sure that the food they eat is safe. Food and feed safety is a key public concern. The EU has one of the **highest food safety standards in the world** – largely thanks to the solid set of EU legislation in place, which ensures that food and feed are safe for consumers. One key tool used to react quickly to food and feed incidents is **RASFF – the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed**.

RASFF enables information to be shared rapidly and efficiently between the European Commission, food and feed control authorities in Member States and organisations whenever a health risk has been identified. In this way, countries can act quickly and in a coordinated manner, in order to **avert food safety risks before they can harm consumers**.

All 27 EU Member States are members of RASFF, together with the European Commission and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway are also full members of RASFF.



HOW DOES RASFF WORK?

The system is made up of contact points in all RASFF member countries, member organisations and in the European Commission, which exchange information of any health risk. There is a round-the-clock service to ensure that urgent notifications are sent, received and responded to in the shortest time possible.

Sending a notification

As shown in the diagram, when a RASFF member country has any information about a serious health risk from food or feed, it must immediately inform the European Commission using the RASFF system. The European Commission then immediately informs the other members in order to take the appropriate actions. This can include withdrawing or recalling a product from the market to protect consumers' health.

All incoming information is assessed by the Commission and forwarded to all RASFF members using one of the four types of notification.

Four types of notification

- Alert notifications** are sent when food or feed presenting a serious risk is available on the market and when rapid action is required. 
- Information notifications** are used in the same situation, but when the other members do not have to take rapid action because the product is not on the market or the risk is not considered to be serious. 
- Border rejections** concern food and feed consignments that have been tested and rejected at the external borders of the EU (and the EEA) when a health risk has been detected. 
- Any information related to the safety of food and feed products which has not been communicated as an alert or an information notification, but which is judged valuable for the control authorities, is transmitted to the members under the heading **News**. 

What happens next?

The members take action depending on the type of notification and immediately inform the Commission of the measures taken. They may, for example, withdraw or recall the product from the market.

In addition, border rejections are transmitted to all border posts – i.e. all 27 EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. This is to ensure that the rejected product does not re-enter the EU through another border post.

European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

EFSA's role is to assess and communicate on risks associated with the food chain. It issues scientific opinions and advice to support the European Commission and EU Member States in taking effective and timely decisions on the actions that should be taken to ensure that consumers are protected.

