

The Incidents Database: Statement of Administrative Sources

Collection: The process through which the “raw data” is captured

Industry and local authorities are obliged to report incidents to the Food Standards Agency. Both industry and local authorities can report incidents to the Agency online. Food business operators are required to inform the Agency or local and port health authorities where they have reason to believe that a foodstuff that they have imported, produced, manufactured or distributed is not in compliance with food safety requirements.

Under the Food Law Code of Practice local authorities are required to notify the Agency of food incidents. Local authorities must follow and implement the provisions of the code that apply to them. Local authorities regularly undertake inspections of food premises and sample products from manufacturers, wholesale and retail outlets. Where breaches of food safety requirements are identified, the authority will, where appropriate, contact our Incidents Branch.

Other organisations (for example, European Commission, Veterinary Laboratories Agency, Environment Agency) have procedures in place to identify incidents worth notifying the Agency. Fire authorities should report (as an Environmental contamination incident) any fire attended by at least three appliances. The Met Office reports fires and other incidents involving hazardous chemicals automatically via the CHEMET system.

Whatever route is used, all reported incidents are recorded on the MEMEX Incidents Database. Notifiers pass their information to an Incidents Manager, who will open an incident for them. The electronic web form captures details of the notifiers, the incidents and products affected. It uses drop-down lists and hover boxes to minimise data entry errors. In addition, users are prompted to complete mandatory fields, and to confirm the entered data.

The Incidents Manager will assign the RASFF Hazard and are responsible for keeping the incident record up to date and accurate. They may amend notification information, contact details and product information provided by the Notifier. They may add records of telephone conversations, minutes of meetings, and E-mails, details of the risk assessment and action taken to the incident log. Users can only close an incident when all mandatory fields have been completed. At this point, the fields on the Closure and Review sections can be completed.

About every month, summary information is extracted for each new incident and collates it in an Excel spreadsheet. Some manual correction and processing of the data occurs at this stage. The Annual report makes use of these amendments as well as an up-to-date extract from MEMEX, and a separate Excel file of Food Alerts.

Application: uses of data before transformation into official statistics

The Incidents Database helps the Agency effectively manage day-to-day incidents and to inform senior management of ongoing problems. Furthermore, the database has been used in the development of the Agency's Incident Prevention Strategy, evaluate potential emerging risks and food fraud. The information also used to assess progress against various incident-related Strategic Plan targets.

The Database is important in terms of 'corporate memory', as it helps to determine what scientific and legal advice was given before for similar incidents and what actions were taken, thus ensuring a consistent response. Data from the system also helps the Agency deliver briefing and answer PQs, Ministers Correspondence cases, TOs and FOI requests.

Access and dissemination: during the period before they are converted into official statistics

Currently, access to the Incidents Database in MEMEX is restricted to licensed Agency staff. They include Incident managers and others who involved in their day-to-day management and longer-term planning.

Each week, a weekly summary of recent incidents is extracted from the Incidents database. Information is only provided at a disaggregated level to senior management. Furthermore, a monthly aggregate summary of incidents is produced from the cleaned Excel dataset. It is chiefly used by senior management to identify potential emerging risks.

Non-statistical publication: any exceptional arrangements for putting data into public domain before they are converted into official statistics

Information about individual incidents is often issued publically. In many cases, such as allergen alerts and product recalls, this is to protect the public. Exceptional arrangements to release aggregate data early are made on a case-by-case basis.

Statistical publication: derived from the Incidents Database

Official Statistics not designated as National Statistics - The Annual Report of Incidents

Synergies: relationship with other public versions of the data

There are no other public manifestations of the data. However many of the incidents are also recorded in the European Commission's Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF).

Security/data protection arrangements

Access to the Incidents Database is restricted to those with a password account. Access to the weekly and monthly summaries of incidents are restricted to a closed list of managers within the Agency.

Where an incident represents a risk to consumers, details of affected businesses may be released to protect the public. Not enough detail is provided in the Annual Report of Incidents to identify individual businesses.

Supporting Metadata for the Annual Report of Incidents

<i>Statistical end-product</i>	
• Title of the statistical product derived from an administrative/ management source	Annual Report of Incidents
• Name of the organisation responsible for this statistical end product	Food Standards Agency
• Name/email address of contact point for this product	Robin.Clifford@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk
<i>Administrative/management source or system</i>	
• Name/title of the original administrative/ management data source	Incidents Database (Memex)
• Name of the organisation responsible for the original data source	Food Standards Agency
• The purpose of the administrative/ management system/source	To record all Food Incidents notified to the Agency, and the supporting information
• Unit of inquiry (for example, claimants, taxpayers, households, accidents)	Incidents
• Intended coverage of administrative/ management system/ source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incidents reported by food businesses under Regulation (EC) No. 178/2002 • Incidents reported by Local Authorities under the Food Law Code of Practice • Any other incident reported where, based on the information available, there are concerns about actual or suspected threats to the safety or quality of food that could require intervention to protect consumers interests
• Completeness, that is actual coverage (for example, take-up rate)	Should be complete for all incidents reported to the Agency. Due to the wide definition of an incident, it is likely that some potential incidents are not detected or reported to the Agency.
• Geographical coverage of the statistical product	United Kingdom
• Lowest level of geographical coverage	Varies depending on type of incident and details provided
• Extent to which statistical end-producers can influence the system	Could suggest extra information, or different classifications, to be provided in the Annual report.
• Data definitions used	See below
• Classification systems used	See below
• The data collection process – periodicity/ timing	Continual as incidents arise
• The data collection process – validation procedures	Use of drop-down boxes, Mandatory fields must be completed,
• Access arrangements for policy/operational/etc purposes	About 100 users within the Agency have access to view and/or edit the Incident database in MEMEX. However, information extracted from it, including the cleaned monthly extracts, may be made much more widely available depending on needs.
• Dissemination procedures (and publication procedures where appropriate)	Weekly and Monthly Reports of Incidents circulated within to senior Agency managers.

• Timing/periodicity of public release (if any)	Not made public
• Nature of changes to the system/source (or other 'noise') which can impact on the statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in law or legal definitions • Level of response (especially Government and Local Authorities) and measures to increase it
<i>Change process</i>	
• Procedures for changing definitions, scope, etc	No set procedures –decided by Incidents Branch, with input from User Group
<i>The subsequent statistical production process</i>	
• Validation procedures	In the monthly extracts, Incidents Strategy Team review the Category field and correct errors. They may also re-class multiple reported incidents as a single incident
• Quality assessment	None so far
• Periodicity of release	Annually (last week of May)
• Potential impact of changes to the administrative/ management system on the statistics	Very large, judging by past experience. Depends on the reporting practices of outside bodies.
• Procedures for mitigating such discontinuities	None. Instead, the discontinuities are highlighted in the report when they are known.

Data definitions

A **food incident** is defined as: 'Any event where, based on the information available, there are concerns about actual or suspected threats to the safety or quality of food that could require intervention to protect consumers' interests.' (Food Incidents Task Force 'Preventing and Responding to Food Incidents' – April 2008)

Incidents fall broadly into two categories. Firstly, there are incidents involving contamination of food or animal feed in the processing, distribution, retail and catering chains. These incidents may result in action to withdraw the food from sale and, in certain circumstances, to recall, alerting the public not to consume potentially contaminated food. There are also environmental pollution incidents, for example, fires, chemical/oil spills, radiation leaks, which may involve voluntary or statutory action (such as orders made under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985).

A **reported incident** is an incident reported to the Incidents Database. They should include all incidents that food businesses are required to report under Regulation (EC) No. 178/2002, and all incidents that Local Authorities are required to report under the Food Law Code of Practice.

An **ad-hoc group** is defined as the Agency staff listed as involved in a particular incident.

A **Lead division** is the Policy Division that leads a particular incident.

An **Incident Manager** is the head of relevant policy division that 'leads' the incident.

Categorisation of Incident Category

Category	Example
Allergens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of wheat in wheat free products • Incorrect labelling of products containing allergens e.g. nuts
Animal Feed (on market)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contaminated Sheep Feed Concentrate • Unauthorised genetically modified rice protein concentrate
Biocides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A pesticide which comes under the regulation of the HSE rather than PSD
Counterfeit Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production and sale of counterfeit vodka
Environmental Contamination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geochemical lead • On-farm lead poisoning caused by batteries or flaky paint • Sewage/chemical/oil spill • Fire (which can involve chemicals)
Food Contact Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration of chemicals from packaging e.g. annaline from plastic, formaldehyde
Illegal Import / Export	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illegal import into UK of dried fish from Bangladesh
Irradiated Ingredients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unauthorised irradiation of noodle products • Inclusion of chives irradiated in an unauthorised establishment
Labelling / Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misleading origin labelling of bottled beer • Incorrect Labelling on Rod & Ben's Cream of Spinach Soup
Microbiological Contamination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listeria, Salmonella etc. • Botulism including on-farm incidents • Shellfish poisoning e.g. DSP, ASP, PSP
Natural Chemical Contamination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mycotoxins e.g. Aflatoxin • Erucic acid • Nitrates in lettuce • Algal toxins
On Farm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suspected botulism in cows • Lead poisoning in cattle
Pesticides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pesticides regulated by PSD e.g. metaldehyde, organophosphate
Physical Contamination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accidental physical contamination of a product e.g. glass, plastic, metal • Malicious tampering with a product e.g. syringe in fruit juice
Process Contaminants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-MCPD in Soy Sauce • Acrylamide • Ethyl Carbamate • Furan
Radiological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exceedance of weekly advisory level for C14 • Lost radiological source
TSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transmissible spongiform encephalopathy
Use of Unauthorised Ingredient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sudan I, II, III, IV • Para Red
Residues of Veterinary Medicines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ionophores toxicity in turkeys • Malachite green in fish • Nitrofurans • Chloramphenicol
Water Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imported mineral water containing barium

Categorisation of RASFF Hazard

Hazard Category	Examples
Adulteration / Fraud	Adulteration - Addition of illegal or undeclared ingredients usually for financial gain · Use of melamine to artificially raise the protein content of milk · Use of Sudan I to improve the colour of spices · Extension of honey with sugar syrup
	Counterfeit Products - Non-authentic imitations usually involving deliberate product mislabelling · Product typically involved include spirits (eg: vodka, whisky), wine, beer, etc...
	Fraud – Criminal Deception · Use of unauthorised premises to produce food · Health approval numbers falsified · Falsified claims (eg: Non-Basmati rice sold as Basmati) · Falsified / re-labelled expiry dates
	Illegal Import / Export · Smuggling – deliberate attempt to import / export by concealing product · Fraudulent documentation (eg: falsified health certificates)
Allergens	Specified allergens Peanuts (also known as groundnuts), Tree Nuts (eg: almond, hazel, brazil, etc...), Shellfish, Celery, Mustard, Fish, Eggs, Soya, Lupin, Wheat and Gluten, Sulphites, Milk / Lactose, Rye, Oats, Barley, Sesame, Mollusc and Casein NB: category includes all allergens incidents resulting from labelling issues
	Allergic reactions with unknown causes
Bio-contaminants	Toxins produced by the degeneration of animal or vegetable material · Histamine / scrombotoxin in fish and cheese · Atropine, scopolamine and nitrosamines in cereals · Ragwort poisoning
	Sewage spillages
Biotoxins	Toxins produced by a living organism · Algal Toxins including: amnesic shellfish poisoning (ASP – domoic acid), diarrhetic shellfish poisoning (DSP – okadaic acid), paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP – saxitoxins), azaspiracid poisoning (AZP), blue/green algae poisoning · Botulinum toxin · Pine mouth from pine nuts
Chemical Contamination	Fires including potential polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon (PHA) contamination

Composition	Unauthorised Ingredients or Processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Addition of aluminium to noodles to prolong product life · Use of carbon monoxide to improve colouration in fish and meat · Dietetic food supplements including sildenafil (Viagra), dexaprine, octopamine, vinpocetine, etc... · Morpholine contamination in fruit
Feed Additives	Unauthorised additives or ingredients in Animal Feed
Food Additives & Flavourings	Unauthorised use of Additives Additives are generally signified using "E Numbers" and include: acids, acidity regulators, anticaking agents, antifoaming agents, antioxidants, bulking agents, food colouring, colour retention agents, emulsifiers, flavours, flavour enhancers, flour treatment agents, glazing agents, humectants, tracer gas, preservatives, stabilisers, sweeteners and thickeners. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Colours (eg: allura red, rhodamine B, red 2G, erythrosine, anthraquinone, tartrazine, sunset yellow, annatto, bixin, ponceau 4R, etc...) · Preservatives (eg: benzoic acid, citric acid, sulphites (non allergen incidents))
Foreign Bodies	Incidents involving foods contaminated with the following foreign bodies... Animal Origin (eg: bone), Glass, Hair, Metal, Paper & Cardboard, Plastic, Pests (eg: mites, rats, mice, etc...), Rubber, Stone, Wood & Other
Genetic Modification / Novel Foods	Genetically modified foods or ingredients (eg: GM Maize, GM Rice, GM Soya)
	Novel Foods (eg: stevia, chia flour)
	Novel Processes (eg: food from cloned animals)
Heavy Metals	Incidents involving foods contaminated with the following Heavy Metals... Aluminium, Arsenic, Cadmium, Chromium, Cobalt, Copper, Lead, Mercury, Selenium & Other
Industrial Contaminants	Dioxins & Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's)
	Process Contaminants (eg: Acrylamide in fried foods, Erucic Acid in used oils)
	Spillages and Leaks (eg: Inorganic Spills (eg: hydrochloric acid), Diesel spills, Oil spills, Organic spills (eg: fertilisers), and Gas Leaks (eg: Ammonia))
Labelling Absent / Incomplete / Incorrect	Unintentionally caused incidents relating to labelling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Incorrect expiry date on product or ingredients · Labelling incomplete / incorrect · Health Approval Number missing from packaging
Migration	Contamination of food caused by migration of chemicals from food contact surfaces (eg: packaging / kitchen utensils) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Primary Aromatic Amines (PAA's) · Formaldehyde · Bisphenol A (BPA) · Others (eg: Epoxidised Soya Bean Oil (ESBO's), Phthalates, Benzophenone)

Mycotoxins	Contamination of foods by naturally occurring mycotoxins produced by fungi (in particular moulds) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Aflatoxins (usually involving cereals (eg: wheat), peanuts, animal feed, spices, (eg: chilli powder), seeds · Ochratoxins (vine fruit, beers, wine) · Patulin (fruits and vegetables) · Fumonisin – Deoxynivalenol (DON) & Zearalenone (ZON) - (wheat & maize)
Non-Pathogenic Micro-organisms	Incidents involving contamination of food with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Yeasts & Moulds · High aerobic counts / TVC · Named Bacteria (eg: <i>Enterobacteriaceae</i>, <i>Pseudomonas</i>, <i>Bacillus</i>) · Unspecified Organisms
Not Determined / Other	Open category
Organoleptic Aspects	Incidents involving taints, “off-flavours” & “off-odours”
Packaging Defective / Incorrect	Incidents involving... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Damaged or broken packaging leading to foreign body risk or choking hazard · Packaging defect leading to exposure of product to an external hazard · Packaging intentionally tampered with / tamper evident seal(s) broken
Parasitic Infestation	Example: Parasitic Nematodes (<i>Anisakis</i>) in fish
Pathogenic Micro-organisms	Incidents involving contamination of food with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Bacteria (eg: <i>Bacillus anthracis</i>, <i>Bacillus cereus</i>, <i>Campylobacter</i>, <i>Clostridium perfringens</i>, <i>Clostridium botulinum</i>, <i>Escherichia coli</i>, <i>Listeria monocytogenes</i>, <i>Salmonella spp</i>, <i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>, <i>Yersinia enterocolitica</i>) · Virus (eg: Avian Influenza (H5N2), Hepatitis A, Hepatitis E, Norovirus) · Fungi (eg: <i>Aspergillus flavus</i>)
Pesticide Residues	Incidents involving the contamination of food with pesticides such as... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 1,2,3,6-tetrahydrophthalimide, Acephate, Acetamiprid, Bifenthrin, Carbendazim, Carbofuran, Chlorpyrifos, Chlorothalonil, Diafenthiuron, Diazinon, Dichlorobenzophenone, Dicofol, Dimethoate Dithiocarbamate, Endosulfan, EPN, Ethephon, Ethion, Fenitrothion, Fenpropathrin, Fipronil, Formetanate, Fosthiazate, Glyphosate, Methamidophos, Methomyl, Nicotine, Omethoate, Oxamyl, Phenthoate, Proflumofos, Propamocarb, Spiromesifen, Tebuconazole, Triazophos
Poor or Insufficient Controls	Incidents resulting from lack of “good manufacturing practice” ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Poor temperature control of perishable foods · Unhygienic premises · Poor thermal processing (ie: product not cooked) · Documentation missing or incorrect (no intention to deceive)
Radiation	Incidents involving <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Unauthorised irradiation of foods · Radiation (eg: Chernobyl, Fukushima, exceedence of consent levels)

Residues of Veterinary Medical Residues	<p>Incidents involving the contamination of food with residues of veterinary medicines such as...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Penicillin, Chloramphenicol, Nitrofurans (AOZ), Tetracycline, Avermectins (eg: Abamectin, Doramectin, Ivermectin), Semicarbazide (SEM), Thiazoles (eg: Sulfathiazole), Sulphonamides (eg: Sulfadiazine), Dichlorobenzene, Lincomycin Antimicrobials / Antiparasite agents (eg: Leucomalachite Green, Ivomec, Dectomax, Cydectin, Monensin, Nitroxylin, Panacur)
Transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE)	<p>Incidents involving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease (CJD) · Failures to clean and inspect susceptible animals properly

Categorisation of Notifier

Notifier type	Description
Local authorities	Local authorities regularly undertake inspections of premises and sample products from wholesale or retail outlets. Port Health Authorities have similar responsibilities for imports at port of entry. Where breaches of food safety requirements are identified, the authority will contact the Incidents Branch.
Port Health Authorities (PHA)	
Single Liaison Body	Local authorities also provide information to the Agency under the Single Liaison Body (SLB) system. The Agency are the SLB for the UK (Article 35 of Regulation (EC) No 882/2004).
Border inspection posts	BIPs are EU-approved entry points for non-EU products of animal origin, originating in countries outside the EU. UK BIPs routinely sample incoming consignments of foodstuffs to ensure compliance with legislation. Adverse results are notified to the Agency and action is taken to destroy the incoming consignment or re-export where permissible. Border Rejection Notifications are sent by the Agency to the European Commission via RASFF for circulation to all member states.
Industry	Food business operators are required by law (Article 19 of Regulation (EC) No. 178/2002) to inform the competent authorities where they consider or have reason to believe that a foodstuff is not in compliance with food safety requirements. In the case of the UK, local and port health authorities and the Agency are the competent authorities.
Fire Service	Notifications are regularly received from the Emergency services. Notifications usually relate to fires, oil or sewage spills or chemical leaks that might contaminate the food chain. However, a few notifications from the police relate to fraud.
Police	
SOCA (now abolished)	
FSA operations group	Staff in the Agency may be the first to be aware of a food incident. For instance, this might happen in a food product survey, or as part of the work of FSA operations group.
FSA survey	
Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (Defra)	Notifications may be received from many government departments and public bodies including the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), and the National Health Service (NHS). NB Customs & Excise is now part of HM Revenue & Customs
Department of Health (DH)	
Marine Management Organisation (MMO)	
Customs & Excise	
Environment Agency (EA)	Some executive agencies of Defra are recorded separately. NB the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency was
Animal Health & Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA)	

Veterinary Medicines Directorate	formally known as the Veterinary Laboratories Agency
National Health Service (NHS)	Similarly, some executive agencies of the Department of Health are recorded separately. NB The Health Protection Agency is now part of Public Health England
Public Health England (PHE)	
Health Protection Agency (HPA) (now abolished)	
DARD	Organisations in devolved countries and the regions such as the Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (Northern Ireland) also report to the Agency.
Health Protection Scotland (HPS)	
Scottish Agricultural College	
Government Offices of the Regions (now abolished).	
RASFF	The European Commission operates the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF). The RASFF is a network of member states, the European Commission and the European Food Safety Authority. Whenever a member of the network has any information relating to the existence of a serious direct or indirect risk to human health, this information is immediately forwarded to the Commission using a rapid alert form. The Commission then immediately transmits this information to the members of the network.
EU member states	EU member states and the European Commission can also report food incidents directly to the Agency, rather than through RASFF.
The European Commission	
Third country	Countries outside the EU also report food incidents directly to the Agency.
General public	Occasionally, the Agency will receive notification of food incidents and quality issues from members of the general public. However, the public should contact their local authority first.
Nuclear power stations	Nuclear power stations should report any food incidents that arise as part of their monitoring work.
Other	"Other" covers any other organisation. For instance, the Anaphylaxis Campaign and Allergy UK will report any issues they become aware of relating to food allergies. Also, Laboratories should report any food incidents that arise as part of their analytical work.

Categorisation of RASFF Commodity

RASFF Commodities
Alcoholic Beverages
Animal By-Products
Bivalve Molluscs And Products Thereof
Cephalopods And Products Thereof
Cereals And Bakery Products
Cocoa And Cocoa Preparations, Coffee And Tea
Compound Feeds
Confectionery
Crustaceans And Products Thereof
Dietetic Foods, Food Supplements, Fortified Foods
Eggs And Egg Products
Fats And Oils
Feed for animals
Fish And Fish Products
Food Additives And Flavourings
Food Contact Materials
Fruits And Vegetables
Gastropods
Herbs And Spices
Honey And Royal Jelly
Ices And Desserts
Meat And Meat Products (Other Than Poultry)
Milk And Milk Products
Natural Mineral Water
Non-Alcoholic Beverages
Nuts, Nut Products And Seeds
Other Food Product / Mixed
Pet Food
Poultry Meat And Poultry Meat Products
Prepared Dishes And Snacks
Soups, Broths, Sauces And Condiments
Water For Human Consumption (Other)
Wine
Not Applicable