

Managing Critical Incidents and Recalls



Why it's important

- A critical fresh produce incident is an event that disrupts normal operations and impacts the fresh produce supply chain.
- This may include natural disasters (e.g. floods, dust storms); criminal activities (e.g. sabotage, food fraud) or confirmed risk associated with the consumption of fresh produce (e.g. consumer or trade recall).
- To manage such incidents effectively, businesses should develop, maintain and regularly test their Incident Management Plan (IMP).



Food safety hazards

- Incidents such as contamination, tampering or mislabelling can cause serious harm to consumers.
- Natural disasters and environmental events can contaminate crops and water sources.
- Poor traceability or inadequate record-keeping can prevent identification of affected batches.



Good practice

- Establish an Incident Management Team with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- Define clear criteria for what constitutes a food safety incident to initiate the IMP and outline potential scenarios.
- Establish early warning systems such as supplier alerts, customer complaints, audit findings, environmental monitoring and weather events.
- Consider classifying food safety incidents (e.g. contained, uncontained or critical) to determine the level of response and coordination required.
- Maintain a centralised incident log with times and dates documented, decisions made, actions taken and communications issued.
- Ensure traceability systems can identify affected produce.
- Define procedures for recall, withdrawal and placing products on hold to prevent accidental release.
- Initiate investigations with structured data collection and analysis using (e.g. 5 Why's, fishbone) and implement corrective actions.
- Develop a communication plan for effective stakeholder communication, including a contact list.



Food safety reminders

- Keep an up-to-date incident management plan accessible to all relevant staff.
- Conduct training and systems tests for mock incidents and recalls at least annually.
- Review incident response procedures after each event.
- Promote a culture of readiness.



Guidance on recall and withdrawal management is available in Section 19.5 of the *Fundamental Guidelines for Fresh Produce Food Safety*.

