



Safe Tables Our Priority

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Mission Statement

Safe Tables Our Priority is a national, non-profit, volunteer, health organization dedicated to preventing suffering, illness and death due to foodborne illness by advocating sound public policy, increasing awareness and education, and providing victim assistance.

21 Class I Recalls in First Quarter of 2007

By Nancy Donley, President and mother of Alex (1987-1993)

2007 has not gotten off to a very good start regarding potentially unsafe food being shipped into the marketplace. At least 21 Class I recalls were necessary to be conducted by USDA (12 recalls) and FDA (9 recalls) in the first quarter alone. The quarter began with a relatively small (15,514 lbs.) recall of *Listeria*-contaminated sausage in January and as of March 9, 2007, ended with a huge recall of *Salmonella*-contaminated peanut butter that spanned 39 states, causing at least 329 illnesses and 51 hospitalizations. These statistics represent only the tip of the iceberg; according to the CDC, behind every reported illness are 20-30 that are not reported. Some of the other foods recalled during this period include *Salmonella*-contaminated cantaloupes and raw milk; *E. coli* O157:H7-contaminated ground beef; *Clostridium botulinum*-contaminated baby food and olives; *Listeria*-contaminated ham and chicken; and oysters contaminated with Norovirus.

A Class I recall is defined by USDA as, "This is a health hazard situation where there is a reasonable probability that the use of the product will cause serious, adverse health consequences or death."

One of the biggest problems relating to food recalls, pre-dating the Jack-In-The-Box *E. coli* epidemic nearly 15 years ago, is that the governmental food safety agencies still do not have mandatory recall authority. While the various sectors of the food industry claim that they need to cooperate or the government can shut them down, in reality, valuable time is wasted while the regulatory agency and the company haggle over the necessity and the details of generating a recall. This creates a period of time where potentially contaminated food remains on the retailers' shelves or food that is already in people's homes. People can and do become sick after eating the not-yet-recalled food during this time loophole. S.T.O.P. has been advocating for mandatory recall authority and the authority to assess fines and penalties on companies that routinely violate food safety laws since our inception.

Another point that S.T.O.P. has been vocal about over the years is the need for the names of the retailers who have received recalled products be made public so that consumers have an easier time identifying if food that they have purchased might be part of a recall. Industry has long fought this idea claiming that their distribution and customer list is proprietary information and a trade secret. Interestingly enough, the USDA has come around to agree with us, but the FDA is still buckling under industry pressure. Although it hasn't happened yet, S.T.O.P. is hopeful that USDA will start publicizing the retailers' identities and set an example that the FDA would be hard pressed not to follow.

The problems of the recall system aside, what the first quarter of 2007 clearly shows, is the need for better food safety regulatory and enforcement practices to be in place. 21 recalls for potentially life-threatening foods is simply not acceptable.

P.S. On a personal note, I am very happy to be back as S.T.O.P.'s president. I return refreshed and ready to work. I wish to thank Barb Kowalcyk, retiring president, for her hard work and to wish her well as she pursues an advanced degree in public health.

A letter from the Executive Director . . .

I am pleased to inform you about the progress S.T.O.P. has made over the past few months and excited to share some of our short and long-term plans to promote food safety in the United States.

Change in S.T.O.P.'s Leadership

Last December, Barb Kowalcyk stepped down as S.T.O.P.'s Board President to pursue other personal interests. We thank Barb for her leadership and wish her well. We are thrilled to have Nancy Donley, who served as Board President from 1997-2004, return to the position. Nancy's considerable experience, commitment and vision will be valuable assets as we move forward.

Victim Assistance

The key service that always has distinguished S.T.O.P. from other food advocacy organizations has been our commitment, from our founding, to provide assistance to foodborne illness victims and their families. As we move to strengthen our capacity to help in this critical area, I am pleased to announce that Donna Rosenbaum has agreed to chair this committee. Donna, one of S.T.O.P.'s co-founders, has not only become one of America's pre-eminent food safety experts, but also undoubtedly has spoken with more foodborne illness victims and their families and spent more time providing needed help over the past 14 years than anyone else in the country.

Donna and Keri Dunlap, a bright, hard-working individual with a social work background, are now coordinating our victim assistance efforts, and are working to re-evaluate and strengthen our capacity to serve more individuals. We have a great team. I look forward to reporting on their progress to all of you.

Communicating with You and Other S.T.O.P. Supporters

We are currently working on developing a new website. This is a large undertaking but we are working with a great group of volunteers and we hope to announce the rollout of our new site soon. We have decided to expand our electronic communications with our supporters. Recently, as many of you have noticed, when there is an article about S.T.O.P. in the news or a government agency has announced a product recall, we have been sending out notices via e-mail (S.T.O.P. e-alerts) usually the same day. These recalls are important information for our supporters, but easily can be missed with often limited media announcements. We have heard instances where these e-alerts have helped S.T.O.P. supporters who had purchased recalled products and who otherwise would not have known about a specific recall. If you have not been receiving these e-alerts, sign up by sending your e-mail address to admin@safetables.org.

Whether or not you wish to receive these e-alerts, we are trying to increasingly move our communications from paper to electronic. Beyond the environmental reasons, we take seriously respecting the generosity of our donors by using their contributions as effectively as possible. If we can save money using available technology to further our mission, we would like to do so.

If you are not sure we have your current email address and want to receive our communications via e-mail, please send your address to admin@safetables.org. If you prefer paper, we need to know that as well so we can plan accordingly.

Spreading the Word About S.T.O.P.

We are doing our best to reach many more people and we certainly can use your help. Do you have friends, families and others who you think would be interested in learning more about S.T.O.P.? Tell them about our website; recommend they sign up for our e-alerts. If you are receiving our e-alerts, feel free to forward the information to others. We appreciate your help in this manner as another way to help S.T.O.P. spread the word.

Sincerely,

Morris Rodenstein

Executive Director



The S.T.O.P. board recently met in Washington DC to plan the year. Pictured above are back row: Laura Day, Mike Scarpone, Morris Rodenstein (Executive Director), Eric Juzenas, and Keri Dunlap (Outreach Coordinator) front row: Donna Rosenbaum, Nancy Donley and Sandra Eskin. Missing from the photo are new board members Kip Moore and Greg Howard.

You're Invited!

Safe Tables Summit Call On Produce Safety

**Have you been wondering why there have been so many recalls
and outbreaks due to fresh produce recently?**

**Many of our members have been asking how they can keep themselves and their families safe but
still eat the healthy fruits and vegetables so often recommended.**

**Please join S.T.O.P. Board Member and Food Safety Expert, Donna Rosenbaum,
for a one-hour phone presentation on Produce Safety.**

**This call, normally reserved for S.T.O.P. donors,
will be opened up to the entire S.T.O.P. community.
But, you do need to make a reservation to attend.
Slots will fill up fast, so call 800-350-STOP or e-mail
Margaret at development@safetables.org
to reserve your place now.**

**Mark your calendars!
Thursday, May 10th, 2007
8:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m. Eastern
Toll Free, 866-309-9610, pass code 39490#**

USDA Steamrolling a Plan to Implement a Risk-based Inspection System

Government inspection of meat and poultry products began in 1906 as a response to the appalling conditions in the meat-packing industry. Now, 100 years later, the way our food is grown, processed and sold has drastically changed, creating new problems that did not exist in 1906. Foodborne illness caused by pathogenic bacteria is one such problem, a serious public-health issue that results in hundreds of deaths and thousands of illnesses each year.

Following the Jack in the Box outbreak and the implementation of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) systems in the late 1990s, progress was made in reducing foodborne illnesses. However, no significant reductions have occurred over the past few years. In an attempt to further lower rates of foodborne illness associated with meat and poultry products, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and its Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) are implementing a new approach to meat and poultry inspection at processing plants – what they are calling “Risk-based Inspection” or “RBI.”

While FSIS portrays its RBI initiative as part of a process to improve its inspection program that began more than twenty years ago, “formal” public consideration of the initiative began at the November 2005 meeting of the National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection (NACMPI). Following NACMPI’s recommendation that the agency engage a third-party to facilitate stakeholder input on risk-based inspection, FSIS hired RESOLVE, a nonprofit organization. S.T.O.P. was chosen as one of the consumer groups to interview and Nancy Donley provided extensive input both verbally and in the form of written comments. In October 2006, FSIS convened a two-day public meeting to review and discuss

issues relating to RBI, and RESOLVE issued its report in December 2006.

While S.T.O.P. supports the concept of an inspection system based on risk, we are troubled by various aspects of FSIS’s initiative. In particular, we are concerned that the government does not yet have the data necessary to determine accurately the risks posed by the various meat and poultry products and the processing establishments. We find it disturbing that, to date, USDA and the Administration have not demonstrated the existence of, or even a commitment to develop, a data collection/management/analysis system necessary to support a robust RBI system. There is also a lingering concern that budget shortfalls seem to be driving the apparent rush to implement risk-based inspection.

On February 22, 2007, USDA Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Richard Raymond announced a timetable for introducing RBI, proposing to begin in April 2007 with 30 locations representing about 254 establishments and potentially expanding to approximately 150 locations by the end of 2007. The level of inspection at a processing plant will be based on a number of factors such as public-health-related noncompliance reports (NRs) and FSIS microbiological testing results, and will be updated regularly.

FSIS is scheduling a series of technical briefings through 2007 to discuss the use of production volume, industry data, non-compliance records, expert elicitations and foodborne disease attribution data as part of its RBI initiative. S.T.O.P. president, Nancy Donley has been invited to serve as a panelist at the April 5th meeting that will focus on attributing foodborne disease to specific foods. Among the 60 invitees are Drs. Robert Tauxe and Patricia Griffin from the CDC, consumer group leaders and industry leaders.



Safe Tables Our Priority

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Board of Directors:

Nancy Donley, *President*
Mike Scarpone, *Chairman*
Laura Day, *Secretary*
Eric Juzenas, *Treasurer*
Sandra Eskin
Donna Rosenbaum
Kip Moore
Greg Howard

Staff:

Morris Rodenstein, *Executive Director*
Margaret Quinn, *Director of Development*
Keri Dunlap, *Outreach Coordinator*
Kristi Scarpone, *Consultant*

Dedication

Lovingly dedicated to
ASHLEY ROSE PLATT (8/30/01-11/10/05)
Blossomed on Earth to Bloom in Heaven

"Ashley Rose Platt Princess" is how you would answer when people would ask you your name. You have such a strength and confidence about you that others admire. You have the ability to make people with the hardest of hearts melt by your presence. You were full of life and are afraid of nothing and no one. Your love for your family overflowed daily. The only one you loved more is Jesus and you would sing praises to Him on a daily basis. You impacted everyone who knew you or knew of you and how you lived your life still impacts people today. I can't wait until we will have our Rainbow Connection and will meet again someday. Until then every time I see a butterfly, rainbow, or rose I will think of you. Everyone misses you and loves you. You are too unforgettable and you consume our thoughts always. We love you.



Mommy, Daddy, Austin (E. coli survivor), Daniel (E. coli survivor) and your sister or brother to be.