

Recall year in review report

Words by Andrew Brown

The annual *'Recall Year in Review Report'* by GS1 Australia was released in March 2023 and reflects on activities and achievements during 2022. The comprehensive report was developed in collaboration with industry supporters and includes articles by Coles and HACCP International, as well as a look into what the future holds for product recalls in Australia and overseas.

As food safety risks continue to emerge, not only in Australia but also overseas, the likelihood of incidents involving unsafe food has increased due to the globalisation of food production and distribution.

Expert advice

Throughout the report, experts in the field share their insights and best practice towards achieving better product recall processes for everyone.

Experts such as Alan Edwards from the New South Wales Food Authority note that legislative changes and risk management are important to consider in the case of a recall.

"One thing that we've learned from previous introductions to changes in

legislation is that some businesses will unfortunately leave it to the last minute," Mr Edwards said.

"That creates problems, as well as creating additional cost and risk, that really can be avoided with some good planning," he said.

Similarly, Michael Smith from Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) noted that we are seeing relatively more recalls of certain products compared to a few years ago.

"These include craft beers due to the secondary fermentation, plant-based or vegan products due to undeclared milk, as well as Asian foodstuffs that have been imported," Mr Smith said.

The report also includes input from Coles, Leah Williamson who is also co-chair of the GS1 Australia Recall Advisory Group. The publication provides insights into supply chain risks and how these can be overcome, including logistics disruptions, increased freight prices, production delays and commodity pricing.

HACCP International's Rachel Meryment provides an overview of HACCP International certification for

equipment, materials and support services used within the food industry.

"A HACCP based food safety management system involves a hazard analysis and risk assessment of microbiological, chemical, physical, and allergen hazards that are possible in each step of food production," Ms Meryment said.

"The risk assessment identifies which steps in the process are critical control points for eliminating or managing a food safety risk," she said.

Recall partners

Other topics covered in the report include the integration of GS1 Australia's Recall system with other solutions to make life easier, including automated reporting and a reminder that 'recalls don't take breaks.' Having a solid recall process and system in place becomes an effective strategy for managing risk. Investing in a greater level of preparedness allows brand owners and manufacturers to act quickly in the event of a product safety issue – even when the world would like to be taking a break.

The report provides an extensive list of recall partners who support the objective of sharing knowledge to enhance recall best practice and ultimately improve the way that recalls are conducted. Partners include the Australian Institute of Food Science & Technology (AIFST), Crisis Shield and Foodbank.

Globalisation and food safety

In Australia, the most common food safety risks can be categorised as microbial, chemical, physical, and allergen.

Microbial risks are caused by the presence of harmful bacteria, viruses, or other microorganisms in food products. Chemical risks can occur when food comes into contact with harmful chemicals, such as pesticides or cleaning agents. Physical risks refer to the presence of foreign objects in food products, such as glass or metal fragments. Allergen risks can occur when food products contain allergenic ingredients that are not declared on the food label.

Food recalls in Australia are managed by FSANZ and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC). When a food product is found to be potentially unsafe, a recall may be initiated to remove the product from the market. There are two types of food recalls in Australia: - mandatory and company initiated. The recall can be implemented at trade or consumer level depending on where the product is in the supply chain.

Company initiated recalls are instigated by the food manufacturer or importer to remove the product from the market.

Mandatory recalls can be initiated by the State or Territory jurisdiction where the company is based. If a food product is found to be unsafe, the jurisdiction may order a mandatory recall to remove the product from the market.

Traceability

Traceability refers to the ability to track a food product from its



origin to its final destination. This is important for several reasons, including identifying the source of contamination in the event of a food safety issue.

Traceability can also help to improve supply chain efficiency, by providing information on product origin, storage conditions and transport routes. This can help to reduce waste, improve product quality, and ensure timely delivery of products to consumers.

In recent years, there have been significant advancements in food traceability technologies, including the use of 2D barcodes. These technologies enable the tracking of food products throughout the supply chain, from farm to table. By implementing these technologies, food companies can improve the accuracy and speed of product tracking, reduce the risk of foodborne illness, and improve consumer confidence in the safety and quality of their products.

In the case of 2D barcodes, the expiry date and recall information can be encoded into the barcode, preventing the sale of unsafe or recalled products at point-of-sale.

Despite the benefits of food recalls and traceability, there are still challenges to be addressed. For example, not all food products are currently subject to traceability requirements, and there is a need for more standardised approaches

to tracking food products across the supply chain. There is also a need for greater collaboration and information sharing between regulatory agencies and industry stakeholders, to improve the effectiveness of food safety measures and reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

Food recalls and traceability are important tools for ensuring food safety and protecting public health. By improving the accuracy and speed of product tracking and by promoting greater collaboration and information sharing between regulatory agencies and industry stakeholders, we can improve the safety and quality of our food supply.

It is important for all stakeholders to work together to implement effective food safety measures, and to continue to innovate and improve upon existing technologies and approaches.

The *GS1 Australia Recall Year in Review Report* is an important resource for anyone involved in the food industry to help protect consumers and safeguard their brands' reputation.

Download your copy of the Recall Year in Review Report here, or visit www.gs1au.org/recall.

Andrew Brown is the Business Development Manager for Service Engagement at GS1 Australia and has a wealth of knowledge regarding the product recall process and the GS1 Australia Recall system. 