



SANCO/G4/KK/ (2014)

**MINUTES OF THE EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF CRISIS
MANAGEMENT ALONG THE FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN**

Date of the event: 14 November 2014

Place: Brussels

**Participants: All MSs except EE, LI, MT and PL; CH and NO.
SANCO Units: C3, E4, E5, G4, F5
Webstreaming provided to EFSA
Civic Consulting**

Introduction and chair: Koen Van Dyck, DG SANCO, Head of Unit G4

- 1. THE EU LEGAL FRAMEWORK APPLICABLE TO CRISIS MANAGEMENT**
See presentation given by SANCO G4 (M. Plantady).
- 2. INITIATIVES AND ONGOING ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION IN THE FIELD OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT**
 - 2.1. Fact-finding series on emergency preparedness**
Presentation given by SANCO F5 (J. Manhardt-Welbers).
 - 2.2. EU decision on serious cross border health threats**
See presentation given by SANCO C3 (M. Zwozdiak-Carbonne).
 - 2.3. Foodborne outbreaks**
See presentation given by SANCO G4 (K. Kostenzer).
- 3. THE REFIT EXERCISE**
 - 3.1. Presentation of the REFIT exercise**
See presentation given by SANCO E4 (A. Nikolakopoulou).
 - 3.2. Presentation of a questionnaire by the contractor**
See presentation given by Civic Consulting (F. Alleweldt).
- 4. HEADS OF AGENCIES RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE FIELD OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT**
Presentation given by a representative of the Heads of Agencies Network (A. Canals Caballero)

See

link:

http://aesan.msssi.gob.es/AESAN/docs/docs/notas_prensa/Sharing_protocols_2014.pdf

5. DISCUSSION

- **Levels of severity of incidents: needed and which criteria to use?**

There are three criteria listed in point 2.1. of the Annex to Decision 2004/478/EC:

- existence of a serious direct or indirect risk to human health (or can be perceived as such);
- possibility that this risk is or could be spread by a large part of the food chain;
- it is highly likely that the risk will spread to several Member States or Third Countries.

The discussion was about the need of additional criteria. Some Member States already use a set of criteria. Public perception is often the main driver of 'crisis'. Transparency in risk management processes incl. communication was seen as important. The suggestions and recommendations of the Head of Agencies' report were positively received. The wording of the highest level of severity as 'crisis' was considered problematic. Putting a weighing factor on such criteria was not deemed practical due to different risk perceptions.

- **Crisis exercises at national, cross-border and Union level; learning from good practices**

A table-top exercise named Aristaeus was organised by the EC in 2013 in Luxembourg on a multinational foodborne outbreak involving both from the food safety and public health sector. EFSA has also carried out exercises/training on risk assessments in emergency situations. Cross-border exercises of MSs involving neighbour countries/regions were seen as a good-practise, which could be further developed. Involvement of the EC (RASFF, EWRS or other alert systems) in such cross-border exercises was considered a valuable addition. Many MSs pointed out to already organise regular exercises, partly on rare scenarios e.g. with chemical or environmental components.

- **SOPs versus contingency plans**

Art. 13 of Reg. (EC) No 882/2004 requires MS to draw up contingency plans in order to be prepared in case of food safety crisis. Regular updates of plans taking into account experiences gained through lessons learned of real incidents or exercises is necessary. The need for harmonised standards for contingency plans was discussed. There seems to be a big variety of existing SOPs and contingency plans in MSs, which will be further looked into in the questionnaire to the re-fit exercise. The integration of such plans with other sectors, e.g. military, civil protection services, was considered to be a good practise.

- **Communication flows between sectors, MSs and EU level**

The Communicators network within the Health Security Committee based on Decision No 1082/2013/EU was perceived as a good example of sharing draft press releases, updates and lines-to-take. Special communicators do not exist in all MSs on foodborne incidents. The role of crisis coordinators could entail also sharing the communication aspects. Establishing communication channels and trust with the media beforehand is beneficial. The EU alert systems such as the RASFF or EWRS were considered important in sharing trustworthy information between competent authorities in a confidential way. Also audio-conferences provide for essential updates. Social media are seen as increasingly important tools for quick communication. Further involvement of the RASFF in outbreak investigations (tracing back&forward) was envisaged as already done within a recent multinational outbreak of Hepatitis A from contaminated berries. The RASFF evaluation also for external communication to stakeholders is ongoing in the framework of the re-fit exercise. A sort of extranet (e.g. CircaBC) for sharing of information between crisis coordination could provide a useful platform.

- **Expectations on the role of crisis coordinators at cross-border and Union level pursuant to Decision 2004/478/EC**

The current list has one appointed coordinator and 1 alternative per Member State and is kept updated by the EC. The role of the crisis coordinators should be strengthened in the future to address and identify all the involved sectors in a MS more efficiently and to cover the whole scope of the General Food Law. The invitation to a follow-up expert group will be sent to the crisis coordinators for them to identify the most suited participants depending on the topics.