

## William Marler Calls on Congress to Act to Protect Nation's Food Supply

2008-07-28

---

The following is a statement from William D. Marler, Esq.: There is presently an outbreak of a Salmonella strain known as Saintpaul that has made more than 1,250 people sick in forty-three states, put 228 in hospitals, and contributed to the deaths of two elderly men.

The following is a statement from William D. Marler, Esq.:

There is presently an outbreak of a Salmonella strain known as Saintpaul that has made more than 1,250 people sick in forty-three states, put 228 in hospitals, and contributed to the deaths of two elderly men. It is the largest fresh produce outbreak in two decades. The source of the outbreak remains, in part, a mystery. A two-month-long federal investigation has been able to tell us only that jalapeño peppers (and possibly tomatoes and cilantro) are causing part of the outbreak.

However, the present multi-state E. coli O157:H7 outbreak is even more dangerous and demands the Agriculture Committee's full attention. Omaha's Nebraska Beef Ltd. has spread E. coli contaminated beef across the country to its various suppliers, all under the guise that existing USDA policy supposedly states that it is all right to sell tainted meat as long as it was 'intact' when it left the plant. So far, there are nearly sixty ill in Michigan, Utah, Georgia, New York, Indiana and Ohio. Some women in Georgia and Michigan have been in the hospital for over a month. 5.3 million pounds of meat has been recalled.

From 2003 until 2007, E. coli illnesses from fresh produce - spinach, lettuce, and sprouts - dominated my practice. After ConAgra recalled 19.3 million pounds of hamburger in 2002, I thought that E. coli in beef had been brought under control. In 2006, federal recalls involved just 181,000 pounds of meat, down from 23 million pounds in 2002. However, since the spring of 2007, we've seen an explosion of nearly 40 million pounds of beef recalled because it was contaminated with E. coli O157:H7. That's nearly twenty thousand tons. Hundreds have been sickened and I am back in the beef business.

I fear we are at a tipping point. If this situation is allowed to further deteriorate, the public harm is going to be immeasurable - both in terms of lives damaged and businesses lost.

After the 1993 Jack-in-the-Box outbreak that killed four children and sickened nearly 700 in several states, the Food Safety & Inspection Service responded by creating and aggressively enforcing the Mandatory Risk Management System. Based on the research and practices of the U. S. space program, the new risk management system established check points at every phase of meat processing. And more importantly, the presence of E. coli was defined as an adulterant under the Federal Meat Inspection Act. It took years for those changes to be adopted and accepted, but progress - significant progress - was made. Until the spring of 2007, E. coli-related illnesses were falling and recalls became a rarity.

We need immediate and aggressive Congressional oversight and support of the Food Safety & Inspection Service of USDA, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and the Centers for Disease Control. Here are my suggestions for where Congress should focus its efforts:

Improve disease-surveillance so that we can better identify and trace what foods are making people sick. The frontlines of the medical community need to be encouraged to routinely test for foodborne pathogens and promptly report findings to local and state health departments and the CDC.

Government agencies, at all levels, need to learn to 'play well together.' Turf battles like those we see between state health departments and the USDA need to stop so we can track illness to its source. Without effective traceback, companies are not held responsible, and thus have no incentive to stop selling tainted food.

Increase inspections. While domestic production remains a problem, imports pose an increasing risk, especially if terrorists get into the act. Food must be inspected before it enters our country, and we need more inspectors, better technology, and better training to do this effectively.

Reform federal, state and local agencies to be more proactive, and less reactive. This will require agencies to be properly funded, and also held accountable.

Modernize food safety statutes by replacing the present conflicting laws and regulations with one uniform food safety law that puts public safety first.

Increase legal consequences for causing foodborne illness and death. We don't need to impose the death penalty, as China did recently. But we should impose serious consequences for companies who don't do enough to keep their products safe, especially if they are repeat-offenders.

Use advanced technology to make food traceable from farm-to-table. Then, when an outbreak occurs, authorities can quickly identify the source, limit the numbers of people injured or killed, and stop the disruption to our economy.

Promote university research to develop better technologies to make food safe, and for testing foods for contamination.

Provide economic incentives, like tax breaks, to companies that push food safety, and invest in research and training.

Improve consumer understanding of the risks of food-borne illness.

I hope that you will act upon these recommendations. The 76 million Americans who suffer from food-borne illnesses annually-including 325,000 who require hospitalization, and the families of the 5,000 who die-would all be grateful.

This article comes from Hotel News Resource

<http://www.hotelnewsresource.com>

The URL for this story is:

<http://www.hotelnewsresource.com/article33730.html>

© 1998 - 2008 Nevistas and the author.

Brought to you by Hotel News Resource

*Distribute your news on our Network*

See what all the buzz is about at:

[http://www.hotelnewsresource.com/Info-news\\_account\\_info.html](http://www.hotelnewsresource.com/Info-news_account_info.html)