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APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework and Associated Guidelines



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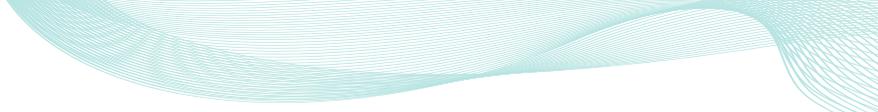
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Note

The references hyperlinked in the Framework and guidelines were accessed on 10 December 2021. Readers are reminded that access to any online reference is prone to changes made by the document owners or holders. If you encounter difficulties in accessing referenced documents, please contact international@foodstandards.gov.au. Food Standards Australia New Zealand will provide you with an update for a period of 12 months from the publication date.



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● EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

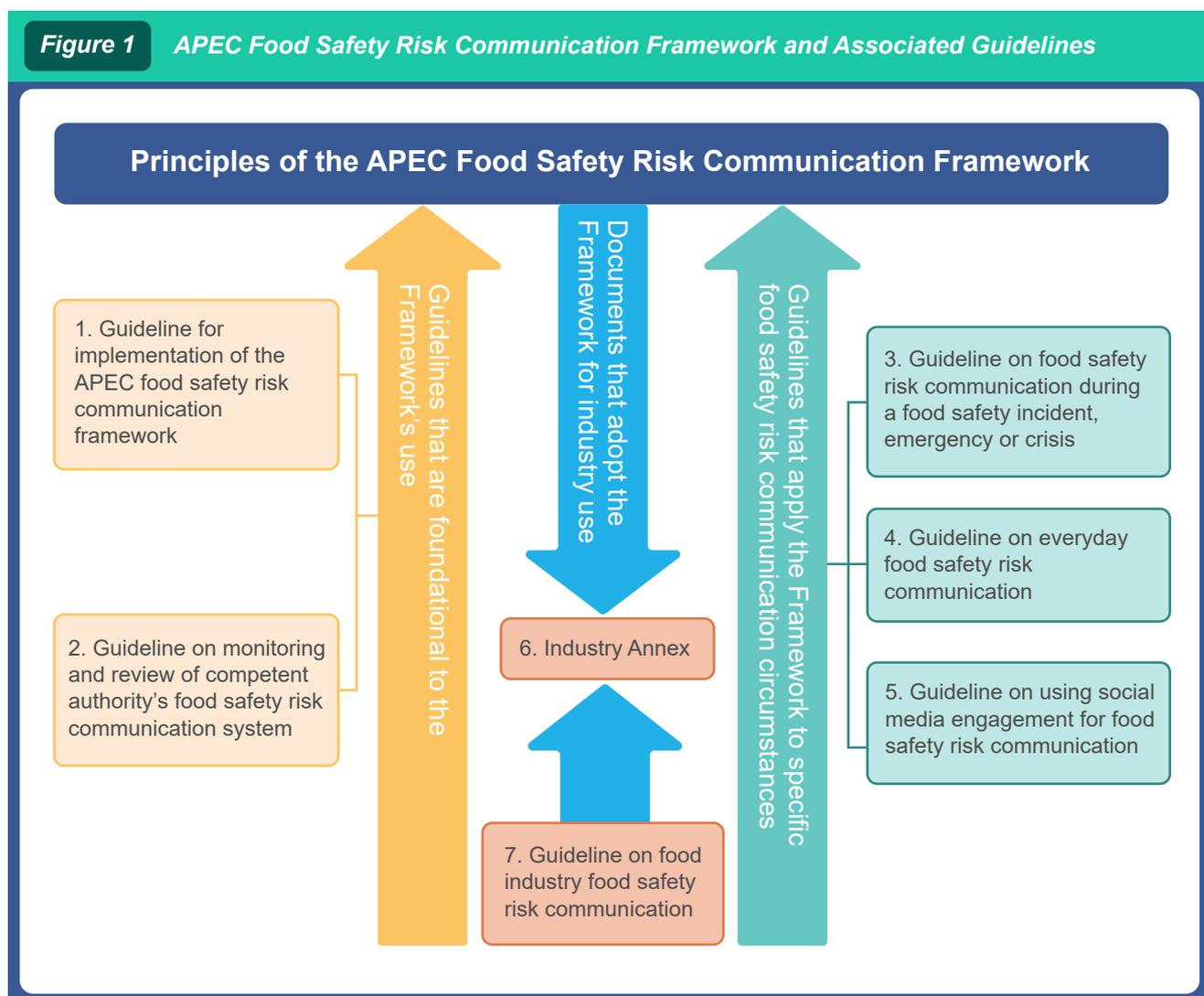
Communication from member economies' food safety regulatory authorities to the public on food safety matters plays an important role in maintaining the public's trust and confidence in the safety of the food supply. This APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework brings together international best practices in effective food safety risk communication and describes these in 8 principles. These principles serve as a guide to competent authorities' communication during food safety incidents or emergency situations as well as in everyday food safety communication circumstances.

Five Guidelines have been developed to support the Framework, namely:

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
|  | 1. Guideline for Implementation of the APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework |  |
|  | 2. Guideline on Monitoring and Review of Competent Authority's Food Safety Risk Communication System |  |
|  | 3. Guideline on Food Safety Risk Communication during a Food Safety Incident, Emergency or Crisis |  |
|  | 4. Guideline on Everyday Food Safety Risk Communication |  |
|  | 5. Guideline on Using Social Media Engagement for Food Safety Risk Communication |  |

Recognising the critical role industry plays in ensuring food safety, an Industry Annex has been developed to illustrate the relevance of the Framework principles to industry's food safety risk communication. This *Industry Annex*  is the 6th document and is supported by the 7th document, the *Guideline on Food Industry Food Safety Risk Communication*  .

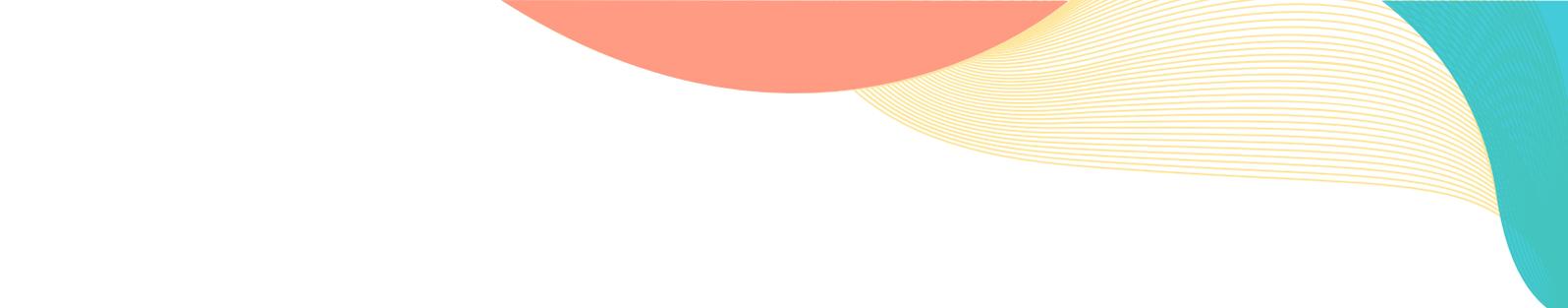
Figure 1 shows the interrelationships among the principles of the APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework, the associated guidelines, the *Industry Annex* and the *Guideline on Food Industry Food Safety Risk Communication*.



While the APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework and its associated guidelines are aimed at facilitating a greater level of convergence in food safety regulatory practices and food trade in the APEC region, it is recognised that member economies have different needs in the improvement of their own food safety risk communication systems. The decision on how and when to implement the Framework is therefore determined by individual competent authorities.

Abbreviations

ACHIPIA	Chilean Agency for food Safety and Quality
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
CCSP	Consultative, consistent, systematic, and preventative
CDC U.S.	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CERC	Crisis & Emergency Risk Communication
CFHI	Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement
Codex	Codex Alimentarius Commission
COVID-19	severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)
CTI	APEC Committee on Trade and Investment
EFSA	European Food Safety Authority
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FDA	United States Food and Drug Administration
FSCF	APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum
FSANZ	Food Standards Australia New Zealand
FSRC	Food safety risk communication
HACCP	Hazard analysis and critical control points
IGTV	Instagram TV
INFOSAN	International Food Safety Authorities Network
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
JIFSAN	Joint Institute for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition
KAP	Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices
MFDS	Ministry of Food and Drug Safety of the Republic of Korea
PIMR	Plan-Implement-Monitor-Review
RMLC	Retailers and Manufacturers Liaison Committee
SEO	Search engine optimisation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WHO	World Health Organization



APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework

● INTRODUCTION

Public communications from member economies' food safety regulatory authorities (hereafter referred to as competent authorities) play an important role in maintaining the public's trust and confidence in the safety of the food supply and the food safety regulatory systems within member economies and the APEC region.

Communication during a food safety incident or emergency¹ presents significant challenges to authorities involved in food safety regulation. Examples provided in *Textbox 1* indicate that competent authorities frequently found themselves underprepared or hesitant in making risk communication decisions despite their best intentions in assuring the public that the food supply was safe. Challenges arise primarily from the difficulties associated with communicating uncertainties associated with food safety hazards (Burger R, 2012 [↗](#)) including:

- hazard origin
- transmission routes
- extent of the exposure to the hazard
- populations susceptible to the food safety hazard
- the severity of potential negative health effects.

Textbox 1

Examples of failed communication during a food safety incident or emergency

1990 [↗](#)



To reassure the public that British beef is safe to eat during the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (mad cow disease) crisis in the late 1990s (Aldhous P, 2000 [↗](#))

2008 [↗](#)



Incorrect attribution of the source of the contamination as tomatoes in the early stage of the investigation of the outbreak caused by *Salmonella* Saintpaul in 2008 (Behraves C et al., 2011 [↗](#))

2011 [↗](#)



Incorrect attribution of the source of the contamination to cucumbers imported from Spain during the initial stages of the investigation of the outbreak caused by *Escherichia coli* O104:H4 in 2011 (Köckerling E et al., 2017 [↗](#))

¹ Food safety incident, food safety emergency, and food safety crisis are defined in the accompanied *Guideline on Food Safety Risk Communication during a Food Safety Incident, Emergency or Crisis* [↗](#).

Public communication challenges come also from the difficulties associated with understanding the public's perception of the food safety risk, and the management of expectations through a communication narrative that is understandable to diverse segments of the public. Risk perception in this context encompasses the public's:

- food safety attitudes, beliefs and behaviour
- level of knowledge and literacy of public health risks on food safety matters
- previous experience with food safety issues
- cultural backgrounds
- socioeconomic status.

Additional aspects that contribute to communication challenges include, but are not limited to, communicating effectively in an environment of:

- rapid developments in social media, which enable information to be transmitted at a very fast speed and reach many people
- misinformation and disinformation² that can spread online at a fast rate
- diversity of needs of the target audiences
- the necessity of ensuring that communications are always conducted effectively as a two-way process (Wall P and Chen J, 2018²).

If not dealt with adequately, these communication challenges can exacerbate negative public health consequences in any given food safety incident, emergency or crisis and can cause damage to public trust and confidence in an economy's food safety regulatory system, which can result in trade disruptions.



Apart from the communication challenges faced during food safety incidents, emergencies or crises, competent authorities also face challenges when carrying out everyday food safety risk communication (FSRC). Examples of everyday FSRC include food safety campaigns associated with seasons and festivals, activities conducted to encourage good hygiene practices by food handlers and

² Misinformation and disinformation are defined in the accompanied *Guideline on Using Social Media Engagement for Food Safety Risk Communication* ².

also those conducted on food safety information and education. It is generally accepted that these communication efforts do not usually attract the same degree of attention from the public in comparison with situations that involve food safety incidents, emergencies or crises.

Modern technological innovations such as irradiation, genetic modification of food crops or animals,



cell-based meat and issues such as antimicrobial resistance and climate change also present unique challenges to everyday FSRC due to the complexities and perceived risk by a proportion of the public. Challenges to everyday FSRC also occur when communicating emerging food safety risks. Examples include communicating food allergen and chemical or toxin contamination issues such as mycotoxins in food, and communicating risks associated with food fraud, such as melamine contamination in milk and powdered infant formula (FAO, 2008 [▶](#)). In these communication situations, particular tensions can exist in providing consumers with accurate science and evidence based

information which may differ from consumer perceptions of food safety. As indicated earlier, consumer perceptions of food safety are reflected by consumer attitudes, behaviours and practices which are influenced by factors such as culture, education, information received or available and engagement.

This Framework captures international best practices for effective FSRC in everyday situations, as well as during food safety incidents or emergencies.

● FOOD SAFETY RISK COMMUNICATION EFFORTS ACROSS MEMBER ECONOMIES

Recognising these communication challenges, competent authorities in the APEC region have invested progressively in their FSRC efforts in recent years to provide stakeholders with effective and timely food safety information.

- 2020** The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service hosted an online event [to establish a comprehensive understanding of how consumers currently handle and prepare food](#). The aim was to assist the development of an effective approach for consumer food safety outreach and education.
- 2019** Chile's National Food Safety and Quality Agency developed a range of 'Creative Tools' [to improve food safety education and communication with a focus on the management of public perception of food safety and food safety outreach through social media](#).
- Chinese Taipei amended its Act Governing Food Safety and Sanitation [with an emphasis on consumer protection and information transparency](#).
- Singapore Food Agency launched the 'Risk-at-a-Glance' [and 'What's on the Table'](#) [initiatives aimed to provide consumers 'bite-sized' information on food safety risks](#).
- The Philippine Department of Agriculture drafted a Food Safety Plan – the Strategic Action Plan that covers strategies on the delivery of information, education and advice to stakeholders, that is consumers, producers, key officials and the food industry, across the farm-to-table continuum.
- 2017** The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) developed a Strategic Plan for Risk Communication and Health Literacy (2017 – 2019) [which targeted staff to improve risk communication skills and literacy](#).
- 2016** The Food Regulatory Standing Committee of the Australian and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation published 'Engaging in the Australian and New Zealand Joint Food Regulation System' [to guide food safety risk communication by food safety regulatory authorities in Australia and New Zealand](#).
- 2014** China's National Health and Family Planning Commission (now the National Health Commission), issued a Technical Guideline on Food Safety Risk Communication [to the provincial health authorities, China Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, National Health Monitoring Centre and China National Centre for Food Safety Risk Assessment](#).
- 2009** The Ministry of Food and Drug Safety (MFDS) of the Republic of Korea established a Food-Medicine Safety Open Forum [for pre-emptive management of food and medicine and operated a consumer-orientated public communication system](#). Through the system, MFDS regularly communicated through its public-private communication channel, such as the Public Communication Group [and Open Surveys to communicate with major stakeholder groups such as consumer and civic groups](#). In addition, MFDS developed a crisis response manual for effective internal and external communication in situations of food safety crisis and conducts education and yearly crisis communication simulation training for its employees.
- The U.S. FDA published a 'Strategic Plan for Risk Communication' [which described the underlying principles and strategic goals of food safety risk communication](#).
- 2006** Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada published the Strategic Risk Communications Framework [to support staff with risk communication responsibilities to take a strategic and systematic approach to formulating and implementing effective risk communications](#).
- 2001** The Thai Food and Drug Administration established and implemented the 'Young FDA Inspector' [project to provide food safety education to school students](#). In the same year, with the assistance of the FAO and the WHO, the Thai Bureau of Food Safety Extension and Support under the Ministry of Public Health established the 'National Guideline for Food Safety Emergency Response Plan' in line with the FAO Framework for Developing National Food Safety Emergency Response Plans. The guideline provides a comprehensive guide on identifying and responding to emergency food safety situations at the domestic and/or international levels. It also includes information on food safety surveillance, investigation, control and counterattack of food safety incidents for Thailand.

Steps taken by competent authorities of member economies to manage the challenges in FSRC include:

- improving communication practices, for example, the development and enhancement of health literacy within the organisation [see above, U.S. Food and Drug Administration 2017]

- enhancing FSRC with the public through the strengthening of stakeholder engagement [see above, Australia 2016]

- developing practical and innovative tools on food safety education and information exchange to influence the public's perception of food safety and food safety behaviour [see above, Chile 2019]

- developing effective approaches for consumer food safety outreach and education through the establishment of a comprehensive understanding of how consumers handle and prepare food today [see above, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service 2020].

● PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The development of an APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework reflects the desire and efforts made to improve the effectiveness of FSRC by competent authorities in the APEC region.

This Framework contributes to, and builds on, a larger body of regulatory FSRC knowledge previously developed by member economies, by FAO, WHO and Codex Alimentarius Commission as well as academic risk communication experts. This Framework incorporates the latest field experience, knowledge and expertise contributed by competent authorities across APEC and reflects unique APEC region experiences and circumstances. This Framework recognises that APEC member economies are at different stages of economic development and have different needs in the improvement or enhancement of their FSRC systems.

 The purpose of this Framework is to:

01

identify international best practices in effective FSRC and describe them as Principles of this Framework

02

guide member economies' competent authorities in conducting FSRC during a food safety incident or emergency or crisis situation as well as in everyday food safety communication scenarios.

Implementation of the Framework principles will assist in maintaining and enhancing the public's trust and confidence in the economies' food safety regulatory systems and the safety of the food supply, in turn leading to trade facilitation.

This Framework recognises the critical role played by food industry³ in ensuring a safe food supply. While the Framework is specifically designed for competent authorities involved in food safety regulation in the APEC region, it can also serve as a reference for the food industry to guide its communications on food safety issues. Appropriate interpretative examples are provided in the accompany *Industry Annex* .

The scope of this Framework encompasses the illustration of international best practices in FSRC both from competent authorities to and between competent authorities and the public and the food industry. This Framework focuses on international best practices for effectively communicating uncertainties arising from food safety incidents or emergencies or crises, understanding and managing the

³ "Food industry" is defined as food business operators throughout a food supply chain and the organisations that represent them, such as industry associations and councils.

public's perceptions of food safety, establishing the standard operating procedures in FSRC, and encouraging stakeholder engagement in FSRC. Stakeholder engagement covers factors such as:



- consideration of the cultural diversity and special needs of different stakeholder groups



- promotion of effective two-way communication



- recognition of, and partnership with, mass media and social media.

This Framework incorporates communication of risk mitigation recommendations as appropriate. It is recognised that risk mitigation is a broad topic and varies according to individual food safety risk circumstances and the capacity of the food control systems of individual member economies. As such, risk mitigation is not the focus of this Framework. Issues such as food security, economics, nutrition, the development of food standards and their implementation are also beyond the scope of this Framework.



● PRINCIPLES

Defined by Codex Alimentarius Commission ¹, risk communication is the interactive exchange of information and opinions throughout the risk analysis process concerning risk, risk-related factors and risk perceptions, among risk assessors, risk managers, consumers, industry, the academic community and other interested parties. Risk communication includes the explanation of risk assessment findings and the basis of risk management decisions. For the purpose of this Framework, we define **‘food safety risk communication is an interactive exchange of information and opinions between competent authorities and the public and food industry about food safety matters.’**

The goal of FSRC is to provide meaningful, relevant, and accurate information about a food safety matter, in clear and understandable terms, targeted to and accessible by a specific audience. Communication will lead to more widely understood and accepted risk management decisions. Communication may not resolve all differences between the parties but will lead to a better understanding of those differences. It will also lead to more widely understood and accepted risk management decisions.

Effective FSRC should:

01

aim to protect public health

02

build and maintain the public’s trust and confidence in the economy’s food safety regulatory system and in a safe food supply.

The principles described below are applicable to communications during food safety incidents and emergencies or crises as well as everyday FSRC. Implementation of these principles will improve the effectiveness of food safety communication conducted by competent authorities. This will contribute to reducing food safety risks to consumers as well as the maintenance and enhancement of trust, credibility and confidence in the economy’s food safety regulatory system and a safe food supply.

PRINCIPLE 1

PROTECTION OF CONSUMER HEALTH

APEC member economies' food safety risk communication systems should be developed and implemented with the primary goals of protecting consumer health and fostering public trust and confidence in the safety of the food supply.



PRINCIPLE 2

TRANSPARENCY AND TIMELINESS

APEC member economies' food safety risk communication systems should be transparent and open to scrutiny by stakeholders while respecting legal requirements to protect confidential information. Transparency⁴ considerations should apply to all stakeholder groups. This can be achieved through clear purpose, scope and intended outcomes of the communication (verbal and written) as well as timely exchange of information between competent authorities and all concerned stakeholders (Textbox 2).

Textbox 2

An example of transparency: the U.S. Rulemaking process core concepts

- CONSULTATION**
 - engage early
 - standardise process
- COMMUNICATION**
 - identify & maintain clear key contact points
 - build strong relationships
- COLLABORATION**
 - build cross-sectional relationships
- COORDINATION & CAPACITY BUILDING**
 - establish private-public interface
 - consider international coherence/alignment
 - identify capacity building needs, linked to outcomes

Transparent communications acknowledge current issues, existing knowledge and knowledge gaps on the subject matter, including associated uncertainties. Transparent communications are open in their content and approach and are communicated in a timely manner. Transparency requires telling stakeholders what is currently known, what is unknown, why it is unknown or uncertain, what is being done to resolve uncertainties, and what the competent authority is

⁴ Transparency refers to operating in such a way that it is easy for others to see what actions are performed and provides open access to information about how food is produced, its origin and measures that have been taken to reduce food safety risks (Source: APEC Food Safety Modernisation Framework to Facilitate Trade [↗](#)). Transparency refers also to policies, practices and procedures that enable people to understand how decisions on risk assessment, management and communication have been made (Source: FAO/WHO Risk Communication Applied to Food Safety Handbook [↗](#)).

recommending based on the best available information. Transparent communication also requires acknowledging that the authority's advice may change as better information becomes available.

Timeliness of the communication messages is important in food safety risk communication. Time constraints arise often from:

- risk management decision-making being impacted by limited availability of information
- time taken to prepare a risk assessment on the subject matter
- the urgency and potential consequences on consumer health and safety imposed by the foodborne incidents or emergencies.

The competent authority should provide clear, relevant, factual and timely information to the public and all relevant stakeholders in a transparent manner to ensure a safe food supply.

PRINCIPLE 3

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

FRSC is an interactive process of exchanging information and opinions between competent authorities, the public and the food industry on food safety matters. Two-way communication⁵ reflects the interactive nature of this process. Two-way communication requires understanding of the needs of relevant stakeholder groups. Two-way communication allows both parties to convey risk communication messages and receive feedback and come to shared understandings regarding food safety risk. This is built upon effective stakeholder engagement and consultation. Facilitation of this interactive communication can be achieved by various channels including the



competent authority's social media platforms, live chat, blogs and consumer hotlines. Traditional one-way communication channels such as radio, TV, videos, newspapers, magazines and the competent authority's website can be used to increase awareness of the two-way channels. Two-way communication means also keeping in contact with the public, making it evident

⁵ See Capacity Strategy 7 described in the publication of 'Enhancing Food Safety: The Role of the Food and Drug Administration', https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK220408/pdf/Bookshelf_NBK220408.pdf

that concerns have been heard and demonstrating empathy and concern. In doing so, two-way communication contributes to building and maintaining trust in the economy's food safety regulatory system.

PRINCIPLE 4

CREDIBLE INFORMATION BASED ON SCIENCE AND EVIDENCE

APEC member economies' FSRC systems should disseminate only credible information based on science and evidence. In conveying this credible information to the public, competent authorities should consider the nature of the hazard, the associated culture and socioeconomic status of the stakeholders involved and any other relevant factors. The spokespersons should have recognised competency or expertise, be trustworthy, fair, transparent, lack bias, be factual and knowledgeable on the subject matter. Spokespersons should act in the interest of the public, be responsible, emotionally intelligent, and culturally competent, truthful and preferably have a good 'track record' in food safety risk communication.

It is important that credible information, factual statements and risk communication messages be repeated multiple times by multiple sources. This will lead to improvement of the public's trust in the economy's food safety regulatory system.

PRINCIPLE 5

FOOD SAFETY IS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY: SPECIFIC ROLE OF VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS IN RISK COMMUNICATION

APEC member economies' FSRC systems should promote awareness and understanding of the specific food safety issues under consideration by all stakeholders. The systems should recognise that food safety is a shared responsibility of all stakeholders, including regulators, food business operators, consumers, food safety researchers and the mass media.



The governments of APEC member economies, as represented by their competent authorities, are responsible for leading food safety risk communication, associated food safety education and information exchange, and consumer and public engagement to assure the public that the food supply is safe.



APEC member economies' governments are responsible for providing consumers with clear and timely information to protect them from foodborne illness, particularly with respect to good hygiene practices in food handling and preparation. The economy's leading food safety authority should collaborate with other relevant government authorities to develop a single source of authoritative information on food safety practices, foodborne illness and risks; and during a food safety incident or emergency or crisis. A coordinated plan of food safety risk communication during a food safety incident or emergency or crisis should be developed to provide all stakeholders with timely, clear, relevant, consistent and accurate information from a single recognisable source within the economy.



Food business operators have a primary role and responsibility for ensuring the safety of their food products so that they will not cause harm to consumer health if they are prepared and consumed according to their intended use. Food business operators have a responsibility to provide clear and understandable food preparation instructions for consumers, to educate the supply chain on how to properly handle food products, to share product information with food safety regulators to help develop a risk profile when needed and instruct consumers on how to properly dispose of a contaminated product. Food business operators play an active role in communicating food safety risks by providing consultation, responding to concerns and engaging in two-way communication with their stakeholders.



Consumers are responsible for expressing their opinions, concerns, appeals and understandings so that other stakeholders can measure the effectiveness of, and make improvements to, FSRC messages. Consumers should be encouraged to share accurate food safety information with others and to recognise and not pass on false information concerning food safety. Consumers also have the responsibility of following food safety recommendations and managing food safety risks under their control by adhering to good food hygiene practices in their homes and the areas that they prepare and consume food.



Academics and scientific institutions are a valuable source of expertise and support for the scientific foundation of food safety risk communication. Scientific publications that evaluate stakeholder concerns and needs during a food safety incident or emergency or crisis will support the improvement of the effectiveness of risk communication efforts.



Mass media, including those who compose food safety news and those who use social media to convey food safety risk information, not only have a role but also a responsibility to provide accurate and truthful information to the public. Mass media, including social media platform providers, have a responsibility to prevent and pre-empt the circulation of misinformation, whether or not deliberately intended to mislead the viewers or listeners, from being transmitted to the public.

PRINCIPLE 6

AUDIENCE ORIENTATED AND INCLUSIVE

APEC member economies' food safety risk communication systems should ensure appropriate involvement of all interested parties in the food safety risk communication process. The interested parties should encompass those who are most vulnerable to, those who may be responsible for, and those who have a responsibility to propose solutions and solve the food safety issue. The dialogues with the interested parties around the science and evidence, about reasonable/practical/actionable risk management strategies, and relevant barriers (and/or incentives) to act, should consider the culture, value, socioeconomic status and other factors of the parties involved.

It is recognised that the perception of the level of food safety risk by consumers and other stakeholders may not always align with the findings of an assessment of the risk based on the scientific evidence. As referred earlier, risk perception involves factors such as ethical or cultural background, technical understanding, level of control by the food business operators directly involved, prior experience and whether there is a benefit perceived by specific consumer groups. food safety risk communication activities and messages should recognise and acknowledge these perceptions of food safety risk while providing information based on science and evidence, to help to reduce the gap between the real and perceived risk.

PRINCIPLE 7

CONSULTATIVE, CONSISTENT, SYSTEMATIC AND PREVENTATIVE

APEC member economies' FSRC systems should aim for information exchange in a consultative, consistent, systematic, and preventative (CCSP) manner, based on risk assessment findings. This approach takes into consideration knowledge, attitudes, values, practices, and perceptions of interested parties concerning the risk or the hazard associated with food and related aspects such as the undertaking of risk mitigation actions by industry. Stakeholder engagement needs to be consultative,

which means that the views from concerned stakeholder groups are listened to and taken into consideration in developing communication messages. The messages communicated need to be consistent to facilitate effective food safety risk communication. The overall communication process needs to be systematic, that is, a coordinated approach following a defined policy rather than an improvised and reactive response. Food safety risk communication messages need to be proactive and preventative.

The CCSP manner should be implemented in both everyday food safety risk communication and in incident and emergency/crisis food safety risk communication.

PRINCIPLE 8

FOOD SAFETY RISK COMMUNICATION IS ITERATIVE AND REQUIRES CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Food safety risk communication is a progressive and iterative process based on currently available science and evidence. Communication messages should be updated in a timely manner as new evidence, including new scientific understanding, becomes available taking into consideration the evolving information being communicated by others. Particular attention needs to be paid to the possibility of potentially false or misleading information.

APEC member economies should have the ability to undertake continuous improvement of their food safety risk communication systems and should regularly assess the effectiveness of their food safety risk communication systems. This includes assessing the reach, trust in and effectiveness of the economies' food safety risk communication systems with respect to relevant segments of the public, to inform on any aspects for improvement.

The continuous improvement of the food safety risk communication system should include the following components:

- development of communication skills to meet communication needs during a food safety incident or emergency/crisis
- improvement of the effectiveness of two-way communication in food safety education, information exchange between food safety regulatory authorities and the public and food industry
- proactive use of social networks to facilitate information dissemination and to collect information about public concerns and opinions
- adoption of latest communication technologies and tools to assist food safety risk communication.

● ASSESSING COMPETENT AUTHORITY'S OWN FOOD SAFETY RISK COMMUNICATION SYSTEM PRIOR TO IMPLEMENTATION

Upon the decision to implement the Framework principles, it is desirable for the competent authority to carry out a baseline self-assessment of the competent authority's current FSRC system and practices. This baseline self-assessment using a communication audit will enable the competent authority to determine the adequacy of its own FSRC system and practices and identify areas for improvement. 'Adequacy' is a self-determined status of performance based upon a comparison of the competent authority's FSRC systems and practices against the Framework principles. A communication audit is 'a comprehensive and thorough study of communication philosophy, concepts, structure flow and practice within an organisation.' The communication audit involves determining who the competent authority is and should be communicating with; how the competent authority is and should be communicating food safety information; what the competent authority should be communicating; and how the system integrity is maintained in relation to the Framework principles.

The *Guideline for Implementation of the APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework* describes the process involved in conducting a communication audit, how to interpret the audit results and ways to generate practical recommendations from this process. From this basis, the competent authority can then develop a realistic and practical implementation plan that takes into consideration resources required and, more importantly, secures the commitment from decision makers and staff within the competent authority to implement the Framework principles.

● IMPLEMENTING THE FRAMEWORK

Implementation of the Framework principles is an important step in improving the effectiveness of competent authority's FSRC system and practices. As previously noted, this will help in maintaining and enhancing the public's trust and confidence in the food safety regulatory systems within the member economy as well as improving the safety of the food supply and facilitating food trade in the APEC region and beyond. Due to different stages of economic development, when and how to implement the Framework principles is a decision of the individual competent authorities.

As described in the *Guideline for Implementation of the APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework* [↗](#), concrete steps and actions based on the practical recommendations developed from the self-assessment process can be taken to begin the journey of implementation. Those within the competent authority with responsibility for conducting the self-assessment will need to propose an implementation plan and gain support and commitment from decision makers within the competent authority before the implementation begins. The best way to gain this support is to involve the competent authority's decision makers in the planning process.

 The proposed implementation plan should:

- reinforce the competent authority's decisions to implement the Framework
- be credible by explaining the self-assessment process and how the practical recommendations were reached
- identify realistic and practical recommendations, how they would be implemented within the context of the competent authority's current FSRC efforts, and who would implement them, prioritising the recommendations in case not all of them can be implemented immediately
- estimate the various resources required to the implementation of the practical recommendations (resource considerations should encompass budget requirements, staff requirements and expertise requirements as resource consideration is critical to the success of implementation)
- secure internal buy-in, commitment and resources by explaining how implementing all or some of the proposed recommendations would help the competent authority achieve its FSRC goals and overall mission.

Implementation of the Framework principles will establish a strong foundation to which competent authorities can then apply the three guidelines developed as part of the Framework package to improve the effectiveness of competent authority's FSRC under various circumstances.

These three guidelines are:



Guideline on Food Safety Risk Communication during a Food Safety Incident, Emergency or Crisis [↗](#) which contains specific guidance information for a competent authority's FSRC in situations involving an incident or emergency/or crisis



Guideline on Everyday Food Safety Risk Communication which recommends the competent authority invest FSRC efforts in the ‘quiet time’ or everyday situation to reflect, plan for and implement strategies that will help improve the overall effectiveness of FSRC



Guideline on Using Social Media Engagement for Food Safety Risk Communication which contains practical guidance information to competent authorities on utilising social media to expand FSRC reach to stakeholders, such as how to select social media platforms, how to develop competent authority’s social media policy and ways to utilise social media for research, monitoring, evaluation and building trust with stakeholders.

● MONITORING AND REVIEW FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The purpose of monitoring and review is to maintain and improve the effectiveness of the competent authority’s FSRC system, keep it current and ensure FSRC from the competent authority reaches the targeted stakeholder groups. Monitoring and review plays a pivotal role in the continuing success and sustainability of the competent authority’s FSRC system because it maintains and improves the competent authority’s FSRC system’s effectiveness over time.



The *Guideline on Monitoring and Review of Competent Authority’s Food Safety Risk Communication System* provides comprehensive guidance on why monitoring and review is necessary, how to conduct monitoring and review, and how often monitoring and review should be conducted.

● CONCLUSION

FSRC from member economies’ competent authorities plays an important role in ensuring food safety for not only individual member economies but also for the whole APEC region. Effective FSRC helps to maintain and enhance competent authorities’ reputations as a trusted source of food safety information to the public and also contributes to the safety of the food supply.



This Framework developed for the APEC region distills and describes international best practices in effective FSRC as the following Framework principles.

- 1 The primary goal of competent authority's FSRC is to protect consumer health (Principle 1: Protection of Consumer Health).
- 2 Communication on food safety matters provided by the competent authority to the public is always transparent and timely (Principle 2: Transparency and Timeliness).
- 3 Two-way communication is intertwined in the competent authority's communication with the public on food safety matters (Principle 3: Two-way Communication).
- 4 Information regarding food safety matters provided to the public by the competent authority is always based on science and evidence (Principle 4: Credible Information based on Science and Evidence).
- 5 Competent authority's FSRC actively promotes awareness and understanding of the specific food safety issues under consideration by all stakeholders, that is, food safety is a shared responsibility among its stakeholders (Principle 5: Food Safety is a Shared Responsibility).
- 6 The competent authority's FSRC approach should include all interested parties in the food safety risk communication process (Principle 6: Audience Orientated and Inclusive).
- 7 The competent authority's information exchange with the public on food safety matters is conducted in a consultative, consistent, systematic, and preventative manner (Principle 7: Consultative, Consistent, Systematic and Preventative).
- 8 The competent authority constantly improves its FSRC practices (Principle 8: FSRC is Iterative and Requires Continuous Improvement).

The Framework and the associated guidelines have been developed to guide competent authorities' FSRC during food safety incidents or emergency situations and in everyday FSRC scenarios. They are designed to be implemented by each member economy according to its unique circumstances. Food will be safer and the APEC region will be more prosperous when all member economies plan for

and practice effective FSRC. The collaborative approach used to develop this Framework and the associated guidelines ensures that it includes many perspectives founded on agreed international best practices.

Finally, throughout the Framework and the associated guidelines, comprehensive references and resources have been cited. Users and readers are encouraged to invest time in reading these references and resources and to recognise that each member economy's FSRC practices and experience can be a resource for others. Sharing individual economies' experiences, successes, challenges and learnings in FSRC will help all member economies.





Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation



INDUSTRY ANNEX

ON THE EIGHT PRINCIPLES OF FOOD SAFETY
RISK COMMUNICATION

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on behalf of Food Standards Australia New Zealand



● INTRODUCTION

Food business operators throughout the food supply chain and the organisations that represent them in the APEC region play an important role in food safety risk communication. With the eight principles of food safety risk communication described in the main text of the Framework, we provide the following interpretation and examples to illustrate how the food industry can apply them in food safety risk communication to protect public health, promote confidence in a safe food supply, and maintain brand and reputational integrity.

PRINCIPLE 1

PROTECTION OF CONSUMER HEALTH



Food business operators within the APEC member economies work as a part of the essential business operation to mitigate food safety risk and prevent foodborne illnesses. That is, they are responsible for ensuring that food products produced, prepared, packed, stored, distributed, or handled by them will not cause harm to consumer health if consumers prepare and/or consume the food according to the instructions on the label.

Industry should proactively disclose food safety risks and identify ways by which those risks could be mitigated by consumers, taking into consideration regulator's recommendations and instructions in managing risks. In everyday food safety communication, industry communications will help consumers manage potential food safety risks through instructions for proper food storage and handling. Generally, the regulatory agencies develop evidence based messaging on safe food handling and cooking practices. To avoid duplication or misalignment of food safety risk communication efforts, it is important for industry to support regulators' risk communications and



ensure it works with regulators to address other aspects of the supply chain food safety risks that may not necessarily be known to the regulators (for example, potential food safety consequences associated with improper storage of food during transportation). Messages and alerts that are clearly communicated, understandable, and easily accessible by consumers regarding a foodborne incident will help consumers minimise the food safety risk.

PRINCIPLE 2

TRANSPARENCY AND TIMELINESS

It is important that the industry and regulators work collaboratively to protect public health. Industry, like regulators, should be transparent with and open to receiving feedback from stakeholders.



‘Transparency’ refers to providing the information that people need to understand the risk and how to avoid or minimise it. It may also involve omitting extraneous information that may confuse consumers or get in the way of effectively communicating the most important messages. For example, referring to the recall as ‘voluntary’ or telling consumers that a recall is being instituted ‘out of an abundance of caution’ without providing a reason for using these terms may undermine the message that consumers need to take the recall seriously and that they need to find and discard the recalled products. Similarly, a product description in a recall notice to wholesale buyers might reference ‘pallet

tags,’ but that information will not help consumers, and it may confuse them if it is included in the consumer press release. Enhanced traceability, on the other hand, may help identify where the contaminated product was distributed in the marketplace and thus increase transparency regarding the movement of ingredients and finished products throughout the food chain. This traceability information can then be used in risk communication messages.

Ensuring regular and timely communication of food safety risk is crucial to protecting food safety and maintaining trust with consumers. For food safety risk information to be effective, it must be timely. It must be delivered to stakeholders while it is still relevant and useful to the primary goal of protecting consumers’ health. This can be challenging if the industry does not have all the information it needs to complete

assessment of the risks, as is often the case in the early stages of a food safety incident or emergency. Nevertheless, industry can earn stakeholder trust and credibility by:



communicating to the food safety competent authority and the public in a timely manner what is known, what is not known and what is being done to understand the unknown



implementing food safety management and traceability systems that minimise risk.



initiating food recalls when there is a reason to believe that an unsafe food might have been supplied to the domestic or international market, or it is required based on risk assessment findings.

Industry can earn stakeholder trust and credibility by communicating in a timely manner what is known, what is not known and what is being done to understand the unknown. It should be noted that the information flow at the initial stages of the risk communication process will likely include presumptions and a level of precaution with regards to the measures implemented. This information should be refined and updated as further detail on the nature of the food safety emergency becomes available (see Principle 8). For example, upon realising its product is contaminated with *Salmonella*, a foodborne pathogen that can cause gastroenteritis in humans, a food business operator should alert regulators and initiate an internal investigation to determine how and why the contamination may have occurred.

PRINCIPLE 3

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

One-way communication, such as issuing a website statement or press release or a food recall announcement can be used to introduce a food safety risk issue, but when used alone this type of communication is not effective for comprehensively communicating the food safety risk or gaining the trust of consumers. Instead, we rely on two-way communication with competent authorities and consumers to communicate with them and constantly monitor whether our messages are being received and interpreted as intended. Two-way communication between industry and its various stakeholders, including competent authorities, customers and consumers, is

vital to effective risk communication during everyday operations and during food safety incidents or emergency situations. For example, only when the industry uses two-way communications can food business operators monitor whether messages are being received and interpreted as intended. There are a range of two-way communication tools. For example, social media allow for immediate feedback and therefore food business operators can engage in an immediate two-way exchange of information with consumers. A 'Contact Us' email form on a website is slower, but it is still a way to share information and receive input. Additionally, it is important to have in place a constant information flow between industry and competent authorities in advancing food risk communication, which should



not just be limited to a food safety incident (see *Guideline on Food Safety Risk Communication during a Food Safety Incident, Emergency or Crisis* and *Guideline on Everyday Food Safety Risk Communication*).

Two-way communication can be used in a variety of risk situations, including but not exclusive to food contamination, development of new products and technologies, and improvement of formulations or composition of existing food products.

During a food safety incident or emergency, food business operators and organisations can become overwhelmed by the volume and intensity of two-way communication needs. These capacity issues should be anticipated and addressed in a food safety risk communication plan by every food business (see *Guideline on Food Industry Food Safety Risk Communication*).

PRINCIPLE 4

CREDIBLE INFORMATION BASED ON SCIENCE AND EVIDENCE

Food safety risk communication messages should always be based on credible, science based and evidence based information from trustworthy sources. This is applicable for everyday food safety risk messages as well as those communicated during an incident or emergency.



It is important that the intended target audience recognises the source of the information as being trustworthy. For example, consumers may view regulators, not industry, as a more credible and trustworthy source of food safety risk information about a foodborne illness outbreak. Hence it is necessary for industry to collaborate with regulators to prepare and provide credible information to the regulators for public dissemination. However, if the risk message is about the food product manufacturing specifications, the industry may be viewed as the most credible source.

PRINCIPLE 5

FOOD SAFETY IS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY: SPECIFIC ROLE OF VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS IN RISK COMMUNICATION

It has already been established that industry has a food safety risk communication role to play in everyday food safety communication and in incident and emergency food safety events. Here are some of the most common stakeholders that share that responsibility and with whom industry should consider engaging / communicating:

- regulators
- policymakers
- consumers
- consignees or direct buyers (who may or may not be the consumer)
- mass media including social media (news reporters)
- advocacy or special interest groups such as NGOs
- subject matter experts such as academics
- internal audiences such as employees
- local/regional/international industry association (as appropriate)
- regional rapid alert system and international network of food safety authorities, network for traded food (as appropriate).

The competent authority has the lead role in food safety risk communication in dealing with food safety incidents or emergencies. The industry has a collaborative role and provides necessary information to competent authorities in a timely fashion while following the regulatory framework implemented by the competent authority.

Implementation of the following essential tools will support food safety risk communication by industry via:

- appropriate and updated food labelling that reflects the food composition, possible presence of allergenic ingredients, expiry date/safe 'use by' date
- implementation and maintenance of traceability
- food withdrawal/recall plan.

PRINCIPLE 6

AUDIENCE ORIENTATED AND INCLUSIVE

Effective food safety risk communication is composed of audience-specific messages mindful of the culture values, socioeconomic status, risk perception and other factors influencing how an audience will receive and interpret the messages. It is desirable to use communication channels that are familiar to the intended audience to deliver the messages. For example, if an adulterated food product is consumed primarily by young children, in addition to releasing a public recall announcement, it may be advisable to communicate with paediatricians via their professional association. Note that to do this in a timely manner (Principle 2), it is recommended that these potential audiences and their preferred communication channels be identified in advance (Principle 7).

In many cases the perception of the level of food safety risk by consumers and other stakeholders may not align with the outcome of an assessment of the risk based on the scientific evidence. Communication of risks should also consider factors such as ethical considerations, technical understanding and level of control as well as previous experience with food risks. Risk communication activities should recognise and acknowledge these perceptions of risk, while providing information based on scientific evidence from trustworthy sources.

Risk communications should not be deceptive and should take into consideration the risks inherent in the food product and how to manage the risks.

Specific messaging on factors such as proper storage temperatures for transportation of specific foods, handling of foods in the retail environment, approved cooking instructions, potential presence of allergens and other relevant factors should be developed. Consumers should be made aware of their own role in enhancing food safety, and the measures put in place by industry to minimise consumers' exposure to food safety risks, such as good hygiene practices, good manufacturing practices, HACCP-based food safety management systems and traceability. Industry has tools (such as those described in Principle 5) to leverage the role of consumers in enhancing food safety.

PRINCIPLE 7

CONSULTATIVE, CONSISTENT, SYSTEMATIC AND PREVENTATIVE

Industry should also engage in planned, systematic food safety risk communication. An internal systematic process and plan can be developed by using Principles 1 to 6 and answering the following questions in advance:



- 1 Who will be responsible for drafting audience-specific communications?
- 2 Who needs to review and approve communications before they are distributed?
- 3 Based on the evidence, what are our food safety risk messages to each audience?
- 4 How will the messages be delivered (channels) to each primary audience?
- 5 Who will be responsible for distributing the messages and engaging in two-way communication with each audience?
- 6 How will we receive and incorporate feedback into our food safety risk communications?

In developing a systematic communication process, remember to consult with internal and external subject matter experts and others who have the relevant knowledge.

Principle 7 highlights the importance of advance planning and preparation. Food industry members who engage in this internal systematic process will benefit by being better prepared to deliver effective food risk communication, which can help meet public health goals, regulatory requirements and operation and industry needs.

PRINCIPLE 8

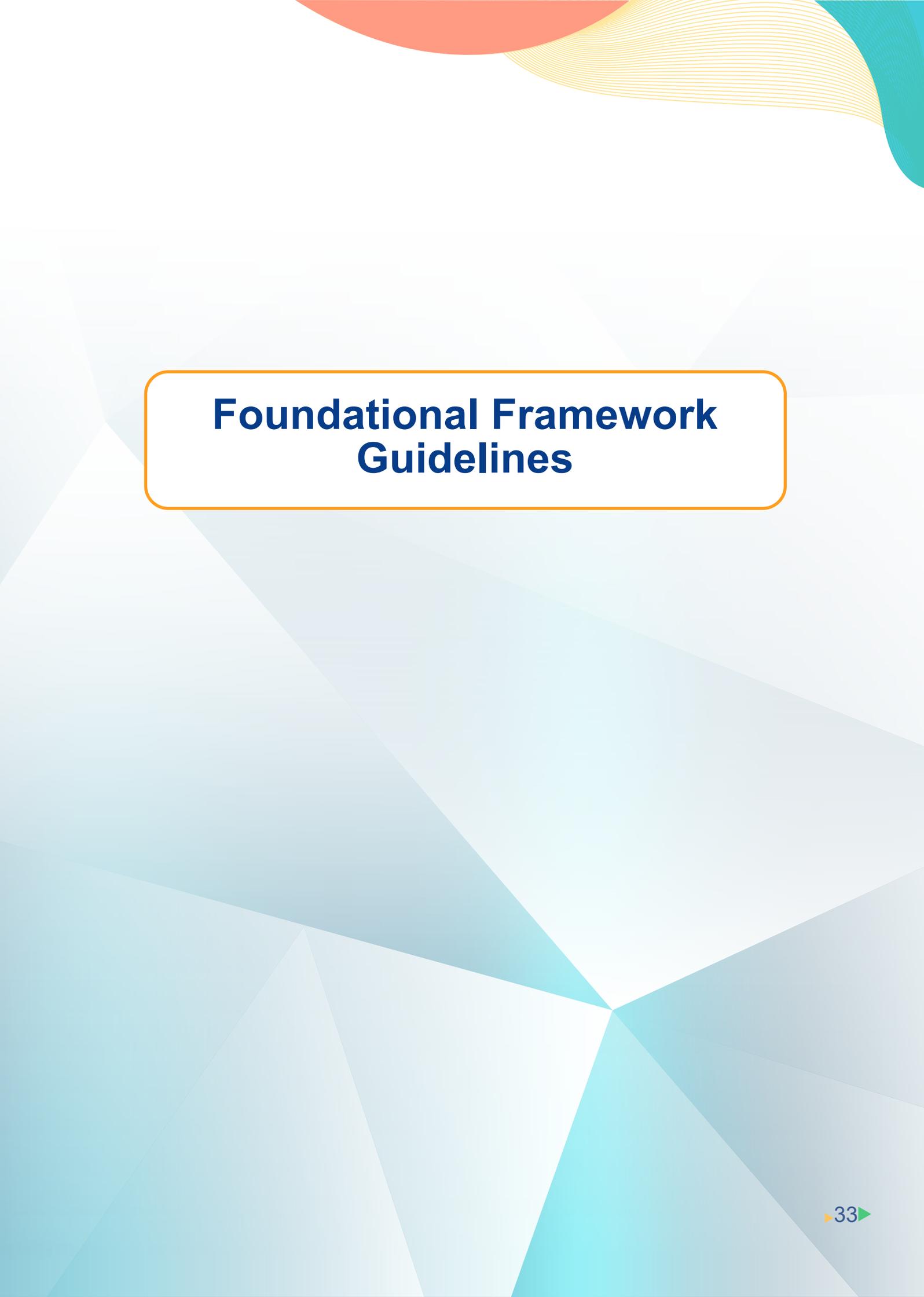
FOOD SAFETY RISK COMMUNICATION IS ITERATIVE AND REQUIRES CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Food safety risk communication messages should be updated to reflect the new evidence. Food business operators should regularly spend time to review the business' food safety risk communication plan to ensure it is effective and up to date. It is a good practice for business owners to provide resources to develop and refresh food safety risk communication skills for those responsible for communication with primary audiences, including first and foremost with consumers.

The eight principles above are relevant to everyday and incident/emergency food safety risk communications. Together, they act as a guide for effective food safety risk communication that can be used by the food industry to protect public health, earn consumer confidence in the food supply chain, and minimise the negative impact on the industry and/or its business operation.

● Acknowledgment

The preparation of the *Industry Annex on the Eight Principles of Food Safety Risk Communication* was led by Hong Jin of Food Standards Australia New Zealand and Amy Philpott of Watson Green LLC. Contributions to the preparation of this Annex were received from Elizabeth M. de Leon-Lim (Philippine Chamber of Food Manufacturers Inc.); Low Teng Yong (Singapore Food Agency); and YiFan Jiang and Rachel Wong (Food Industry Asia).



Foundational Framework Guidelines



Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation



Guideline for Implementation of the APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework

Authors: Amy Philpott and Hong Jin
on behalf of Food Standards Australia New Zealand



● INTRODUCTION

This Guideline provides information to food safety regulatory authorities (hereafter referred to as competent authorities) of APEC member economies on how to implement the APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework (the Framework) into their own food safety risk communication (FSRC) systems. This is not a guide on how to specifically implement FSRC campaigns, which is provided by other relevant guidelines, see *Guideline on Everyday Food Safety Risk Communication* and *Guideline on Food Safety Risk Communication during a Food Safety Incident, Emergency or Crisis*. Consistent implementation of the Framework helps maintain and enhance public trust and confidence in member economies' food safety regulatory systems and helps ensure the safety of food supply. This subsequently assists trade facilitation of food ingredients and products in the APEC region.



This Guideline comprises four parts:

- 1 an introduction of the Framework and its supporting guidelines
- 2 a description of the APEC perspective regarding the implementation of the Framework by APEC competent authorities
- 3 a guide to the self-assessment of the adequacy of an individual competent authority's FSRC system, information and accountability as they pertain to the Framework principles
- 4 recommendations on how to implement the Framework principles with the assumption that the competent authority has decided to implement the APEC FSRC Framework.

The latter two parts consider the competent authority's capacity and experience in FSRC, relevant policy objectives and the different levels of consumer protection (and associated measures) regarding food safety risks set by each member economy.

While this Guideline is specifically designed for competent authorities involved in food safety regulation in the APEC region, it can also serve as a reference to implementing the APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework by the food industry in the APEC region.

● The APEC food safety risk communication framework principles and associated guidelines

Communication from member economies' competent authorities to the public on food safety matters plays an important role in maintaining the public's trust and confidence in the safety of the food supply. The Framework presents and describes international best practices in effective FSRC via eight FSRC principles. These principles are:

- 1 Protection of consumer health
- 2 Transparency and timeliness
- 3 Two-way communication
- 4 Credible information based on science and evidence
- 5 Food safety is a shared responsibility
- 6 Audience orientated and inclusive
- 7 Consultative, consistent, systematic and preventative
- 8 Food safety communication is iterative and requires continuous improvement

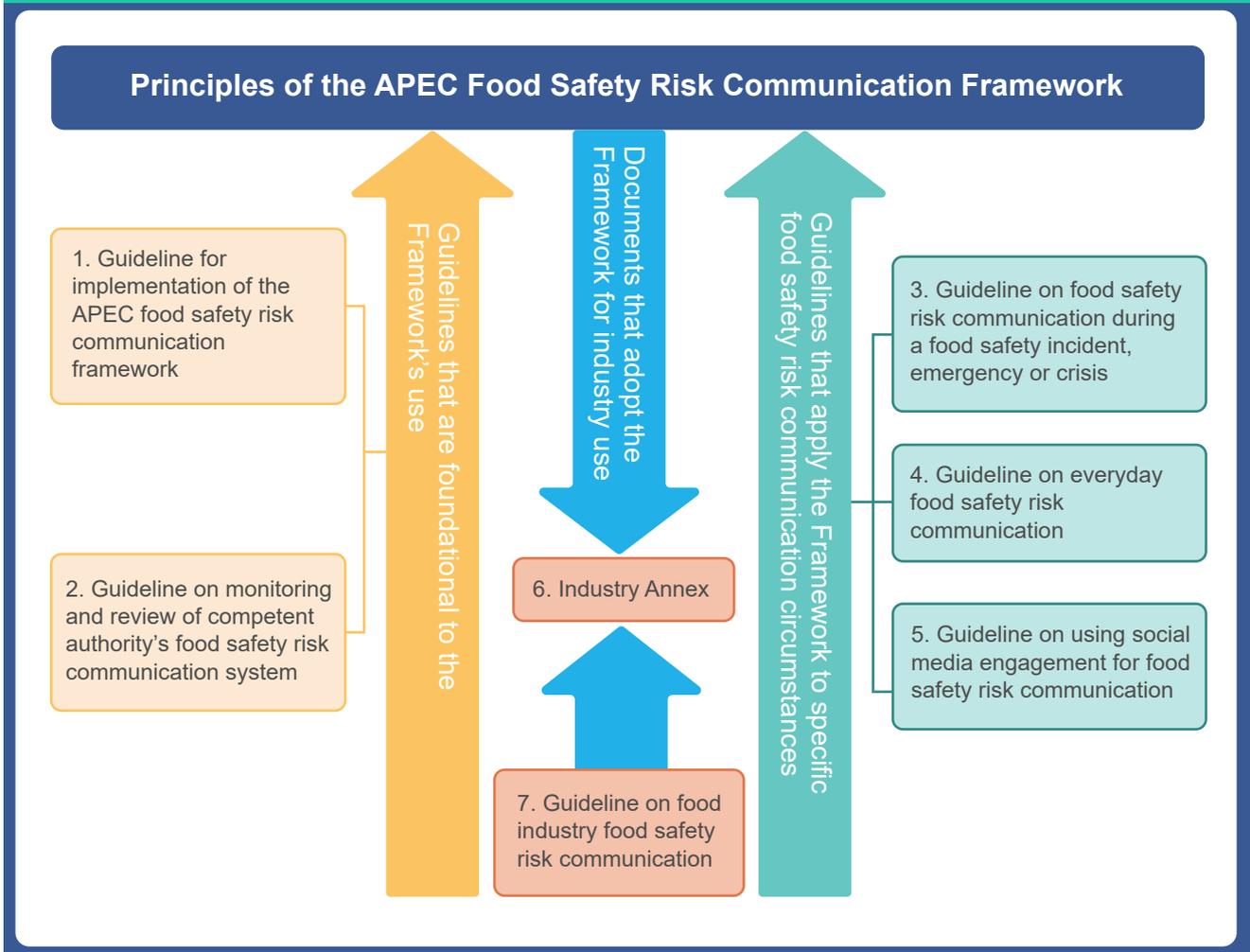
These principles serve as a guide to competent authorities' FSRC during a food safety incident, emergency or crisis, and in everyday FSRC.

The definitions of 'food safety incident', 'food safety emergency' and 'food safety crisis' are defined in the *Guideline on Food Safety Risk Communication during a Food Safety Incident, Emergency or Crisis* [↗](#).

The Framework and supporting guidelines were developed on a voluntary and consensus basis by competent authorities and stakeholders in the APEC region.

The Framework and its supporting guidelines are interlinked (Figure 1). For their relationship, see the Executive Summary of the Framework.

Figure 1 APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework and Associated Guidelines



The Framework, including this Guideline, recognises that APEC member economies are at different stages of economic development and have different needs in their improvement or enhancement of their own FSRC systems.

Importantly, the Framework and the associated guidelines focus on FSRC between the competent authorities and the public. They do not cover communications between risk assessors and risk managers under the food safety risk analysis paradigm as described by the FAO [▶](#); mitigation measures for food safety risks; matters regarding food security, economics, nutrition; the development of food standards; nor the adoption and implementation of food safety regulatory measures. Comprehensive guidelines on these topics are available from organisations such as the FAO [▶](#), WHO and the Codex Alimentarius.

● The APEC perspective

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) operates as a cooperative, multilateral economic and trade forum. It is the only international intergovernmental group in the world committed to reducing barriers to trade and investment without requiring its members to enter legally binding obligations. APEC achieves its goals by promoting open dialogue, respecting the views of all participants, and arriving at decisions on a consensus basis, giving equal weight to the views of all members.

Four core committees and their respective working groups provide strategic policy recommendations to APEC Leaders and Ministers who annually set the vision for overarching APEC goals and initiatives. These four committees are: the Committee on Trade and Investment; the Senior Officials' Meeting Steering Committee on Economic and Technical Cooperation; the Economic Committee; and the Budget and Management Committee. The working groups are then tasked with implementing these initiatives through a variety of APEC-funded projects. Members also take individual and collective actions to carry out APEC initiatives in their individual economies with the assistance of APEC capacity building projects. Commitments are undertaken on a voluntary basis and capacity building projects help members implement APEC initiatives.

The Framework falls into the area of capacity building as an initiative of the APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum (FSCF), a sub-forum under the Subcommittee on Standards and Conformance, which is under the purview of the Committee on Trade and Investment. This APEC structure and operating mechanism mean that decisions on when and how to implement the Framework belong to the individual economy which will be largely driven by their competent authority. This Guideline is therefore developed to assist competent authorities of member economies to implement the APEC FSRC Framework.

● Baseline self-assessment using a communication audit



After a competent authority has decided to implement the Framework, the first step is to conduct a baseline self-assessment to determine the pre-implementation adequacy of the competent authority's FSRC system. The intention of this process is to improve the effectiveness of future FSRC through the implementation of the Framework.

'Adequacy' is defined as a self-determined state of performance based upon a comparison of the current competent authority's FSRC and practices against the Framework's eight principles. This comparison, or baseline self-assessment, can be conducted using a 'communication audit' which is defined by Hargie and Tourish (1993) as 'a comprehensive and thorough study of communication philosophy, concepts, structure flow and practice within an organisation.' This process allows understanding of an organisation's current state of internal and/or external communication systems.

This Guideline uses the communication audit for determining the adequacy of the current state of communication management systems. The communication audit identifies and compares to whom the competent authority needs to communicate with, to whom it is actually communicating; and how the competent authority should be communicating with; how it actually is communicating. The Guideline also considers communication messages and accountability, which can be described as what the competent authority should be communicating and how system integrity is maintained. All these factors are considered as they relate to the eight Framework principles. Questions that can be asked to help determine the adequacy of a competent authority's current FSRC system and practices are shown in Table 1.

How to carry out the self-assessment through a communication audit

The communication audit questions (Table 1) can be answered using various communication audit measuring tools, depending on a competent authority's capacity and resources. In general terms, audit measures include interviews and/or questionnaires administered to participants asking them to evaluate current communication practices and to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses and



suggest how improvements could be made. Other measuring tools include, but are not limited to, critical review of a sample of written, visual and oral communication materials, live observations (such as focus groups or social media monitoring) and institutional feedback systems such as staff meetings and consumer complaint logs.

The competent authority can set up an internal focus group to participate in the communication audit and provide valuable stakeholder input. The membership of the focus group may include representation from:

- the leadership team of the competent authority
- the organisation's communication team
- public communication specialists
- the organisation's public relations team
- the organisation's food safety risk management team
- those responsible for liaison and coordination with other competent authorities within the economy (if applicable).

This focus group should help set the agenda for the self-assessment process, progress the self-assessment and report regularly on progress made to the competent authority's leadership team. It is desirable that the focus group keep the whole organisation involved by providing an initial briefing, an update midway through the process of the self-assessment, and a final presentation of the findings of the self-assessment.



Alternatively, the communication audit can be conducted by collecting opinions and inputs from stakeholders outside of the organisation through a survey or a stakeholder consultation conversation. This may involve the preparation of a paper that describes the intent of the self-assessment, the steps involved in seeking inputs from stakeholders, and how the inputs will be evaluated to generate appropriate outputs from the self-assessment. The same paper could include a questionnaire which has a list of well-designed questions for stakeholder groups to provide responses. A modified questionnaire can be provided to staff within

the organisation to seek their input. After appropriate analysis and evaluation of the feedback received, the competent authority can generate an outcome report of the self-assessment.

The baseline self-assessment can benefit from the involvement of a social scientist or expert in the field of FSRC communication and public relations from a government perspective to assist with the design and conduct of the self-assessment and the preparation of an outcome report from the communication audit.

Interpreting the communication audit results and making recommendations

The communication audit results are compiled into the outcome of the baseline self-assessment and then results are analysed and interpreted. Findings may be categorised as areas of strength, areas of immediate improvement, areas of medium and long term improvement. The competent authority can then recommend which improvements can be made to adequately implement part or all of the Framework principles. In making these decisions, the competent authority should consider how each recommended improvement in FSRC reflects its overall food safety regulatory objectives.



Appropriate recommendations should be consistent with the organisation's overall food safety objective and should take into consideration of the economy's long term economic development and population health goals.

Appropriate recommendations should also reflect the current stage of economic development and future capacity building needs. *The Safe Food Imperative: Accelerating progress in low- and*

middle-income countries published by the World Bank includes a useful discussion on different stages of food safety infrastructure for different appropriate levels of food safety protection.

Other factors influencing how the competent authority implements the Framework include, but are not limited to, the competent authority's desire to align with international best practices for effective FSRC. In this consideration, the element of convergence in food safety regulation within the APEC region plays a role.

Due to the nature of the self-assessment and the differing circumstances of competent authorities, appropriate recommendations generated from the communication audit will be tied to the individual competent authority. The common denominator is that the recommendations need to be practical for implementation. 'Practical' in this case means that resources, capacity and expertise are available for the implementation of the recommendations, and a realistic timeframe is relatively certain.



A small proportion of the recommendations can be what is described as ‘aspirational.’ Implementation of these aspirational recommendations will generally be impractical at the time but can be actioned when resources and expertise become available, as well as suitable timing and opportunities.

The findings and recommendations from the communication audit and resulting baseline self assessment need to be tailored to the competent authority’s own circumstances (Table 2).

● Implementing the self-assessment recommendations



Implementation of the Framework is based on the baseline self-assessment, and recommendations. However, it is not enough to simply make recommendations. Recommendations need to lead to concrete steps and actions taken to implement the change or changes. Those within the competent authority who are charged with conducting the self-assessment will need to propose a plan and gain support and commitment from internal decision-makers. The best way to gain this support is to involve the competent authority’s decision-makers in the planning process.

It is necessary that the proposed Framework implementation plan reinforces the competent authority’s decisions to implement the Framework, highlights the key findings of the baseline self-assessment conducted, and acknowledges the benefits of a successful implementation of the Framework to the competent authority. The implementation plan needs to demonstrate credibility by explaining the self-assessment process and showing how recommendations were reached. The plan should clearly identify realistic and practical recommendations, how these would be implemented within the context of the competent authorities’ current FSRC efforts, and who will implement them as well as prioritise the recommendations in case not all of them can be implemented immediately. It is important to estimate the various

resources required to implement the recommendations. Resource considerations should look at budget requirements, staff commitment, and expertise requirement and timeframe. The proposed Framework implementation plan can best secure internal buy-in, commitment and resources by explaining how implementation of all or some of the proposed recommendations would help the competent authority achieve its FSRC goals and overall mission.



Four supporting guidelines developed as part of the Framework package, that is the *Guideline on Food Safety Risk Communication during a Food Safety Incident, Emergency or Crisis* [↗](#), the *Guideline on Everyday Food Safety Risk Communication* [↗](#), the *Guideline on Using Social Media Engagement for Food Safety Risk Communication* [↗](#), and the *Guideline on Monitoring and Review of Competent Authority’s Food Safety Risk Communication System* [↗](#)

contain practical information for improving the effectiveness of competent authorities’ FSRC under various circumstances.

● Conclusion

Implementation of the Framework principles is an important step in improving the effectiveness of competent authorities’ FSRC systems and practices, which in turn, helps facilitate trade in the region. A communication audit is one tool that a competent authority can use to measure and improve the adequacy of its FSRC system, messages and accountability. When and how to implement the Framework principles is a decision of the individual competent authority.

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• Further Readings



EFSA (2020) Communication Inside of Risk Assessment and Risk Management (COMRISK): Final Report. EFSA Journal 2020;17(7):EN-1891



FAO/WHO (2016) RISK COMMUNICATION APPLIED TO FOOD SAFETY HANDBOOK (Appendix 1 of this publication describes capacity needs for food safety risk communication)



International Food Information Council (2015) Food Safety – a Communicator's Guide to Improve Understanding.



FSANZ (January 2014) "Risk Analysis in Food Regulation" describes how FSANZ uses risk analysis to manage a range of food-related health risks



CTI Sub-Fora & Industry Dialogues Groups, Subcommittee on Standards and Conformance (SCSC) (2008) Capacity Building Training on Food Safety Risk Communication for APEC Developing Member Economies contains useful information



Table 1. Example FSRC communication audit questions

This table provides examples of communication audit questions. It is not an exhaustive list, and competent authorities may choose to use all, some or none of these questions. This is an example only and may be used or modified as necessary by each competent authority. It is advised to seek professional advice when developing the final questions. Please also note that not all questions will be appropriate to ask all respondents, and the questions should pertain to an individual's role in the competent authority's FSRC system.

FSRC Management Systems

Framework Principles	Who should the competent authority communicate with?	Who is the competent authority actually communicating with?	How should the competent authority be communicating?	How is the competent authority actually communicating?
Principle 1: The primary goal of competent authority's FSRC is to protect consumer health and fostering public trust and confidence in the safety of the food supply.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How many FSRC campaigns targeting the public or subset of the public have we implemented in the past x years? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Name the various groups to whom we have communicated food safety information in the last x months. 3. Which groups did we communicate with most frequently? Why? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4. How do different sectors of the public prefer to receive food safety information? 5. Of those preferred channels, which ones can be used to reach the public quickly in the case of a crisis or emergency? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Over the past x months, which channels did we use to send food safety information messages to our audiences? Why do we use those channels?
Principle 2: Transparency and Timeliness. Communication on food safety matters provided by the competent authority to the public is always transparent and timely.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Did we share our FSRC goals and systems with other stakeholders over the past x months? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8. If we did share our FSRC goals and systems with other stakeholders, which ones? 9. If we did not share our FSRC goals and systems with other stakeholders, why not? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10. How do we (or would we) share FSRC system information with stakeholders? 11. Do we consciously time our FSRC message dissemination so that our targeted audiences receive them when they need or want them? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Over the past x months, did we have a system in place to receive input and feedback from stakeholders? If so, which stakeholders, what is it, and who was responsible for it? 13. In cases where we did not do so, why did we not provide timely information?
Principle 3: Two-way Communication. Two-way communication is intertwined in the competent authority's communication with the public on food safety matters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14. Over the past x months, has our communication leadership and internal culture promoted two-way communication with the public regarding FSRC? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15. If we did use two-way FSRC communication with the public in the past x months, which public sector(s) engaged with us the most frequently? Why? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16. Over the past x months, did we use two-way communication channels to deliver our FSRC messages? If not, why? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Which of our FSRC channels allowed the public to engage in a two-way interaction with us? 18. Of the channels we used that were not two-way, which could become two-way or drive audiences to a two-way communication channel?

<p>Principle 6: Audience Orientated and Inclusiveness. The competent authority's FSRC approach is inclusive and audience orientated.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19. In the past x months, did our FSRC target those who are most vulnerable to be affected by, those who may be responsible for causing, and those who have the responsibility to propose solutions and solve the food safety issue? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20. In the past x months, which specific audiences did we target with FSRC? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21. In the past x months, did we consider our audiences' culture, values, social and economic status and other relevant factors in our FSRC? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22. In what ways did our FSRC consider the culture, values, social and economic status and other relevant factors of our audiences?
<p>Principle 7: Consultative, Consistent, Systematic, and Preventative. The competent authority's information exchange with the public on food safety matters is conducted in a consultative, consistent, systematic and preventative manner.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 23. In the past x months, have we consulted with internal and external subject matter experts and others who have the relevant knowledge? • 24. In the same period, did we listen to and consider the views from concerned stakeholder groups when developing communication messages? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25. In the past x months, can you name any internal or external subject matter expert we have consulted with on food safety matters? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 26. Were the FSRC messages consistent from one audience to another? • 27. Did we understand how each audience perceived the risk to be addressed in our FSRC? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28. Would you describe our FSRC efforts mostly planned and well-thought-out or more spontaneous and ad hoc? • 29. How did we go about understanding how different audiences perceived a specific risk (give an example if possible)?

FSRC Messages

	What should the competent authority communicate?
<p>Principle 4: Credible Information based on Science and Evidence. Information regarding food safety matters provided to the public by the competent authority is always based on science and evidence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30. In the sample of materials selected for audit review, how many messages were based on science? Of those, how many cited or referred to a piece of credible evidence or a scientific source? • 31. In the past x months, has our FSRC spokesperson(s) been recognised among the public as competent, trustworthy, fair, objective and knowledgeable? If not, what support can we give the spokesperson to achieve this recognition? • 32. In the past x months, how many times did our FSRC acknowledge uncertainties associated with a food safety risk? How many times did we not recognise the uncertainties? Do you know why we did not? • 33. In the past x months, how many times did we repeat the same or similar FSRC messages? (For example, how many times did we repeat the message that conveyed the concept that food safety is a shared responsibility?)
<p>Principle 5: Competent authority's FSRC actively promotes awareness and understanding of food safety issues under consideration by all stakeholders, i.e., food safety is a shared responsibility among its stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 34. In the sample of materials selected for this audit, how many of our messages were (proactive) and how many were (reactive)? • 35. In the past x months, how many times did we promote awareness and understanding of specific food safety issues to the mass media, food business operators, consumers, academics and scientific institutions? Were there others to whom we promoted these messages? • 36. In the past x months, how did we promote the message that food safety is a shared responsibility to the mass media, food business operators, consumers, academics and scientific institutions? Were there others to whom we promoted these messages?

FSRC Accountability

	How is the FSRC system's integrity maintained?
<p>Principle 8: FSRC is Iterative and Requires Continuous Improvement. The competent authority constantly improves its FSRC approaches.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 37. In the past x years, how often did we assess our FSRC system for its effectiveness? • 38. When we assessed our FSRC system, how did we do that? If we didn't, how do you think we should have? • 39. If it were decided to assess the effectiveness of our FSRC 'regularly', what does 'regularly' mean to you? How often do you think we should assess our FSRC system? • 40. Whose responsibility should it be to assess our FSRC system?

Table 2. Partial example of baseline self-assessment based on a FSRC communication audit

Below are examples of how the audit summary, assessment and recommendations can be organised for Framework principles one and five, which were chosen randomly. Competent authorities may choose another format that better fits their circumstances.

Framework principles	Summary of Communication audit findings	Adequacy assessment (How do the findings compare to the Framework Principles?)	Recommendations to effectively implement the APEC FSRC Framework (identify those that are practical and those that are aspirational)
<p>Principle 1: The primary goal of competent authority's FSRC is to protect consumer health</p>	<p>A review of the FSRC activities conducted by our organisation in the previous 3 years (36 months) indicates our FSRC has always placed the protection of consumer health' as the primary objective. This was particularly the case during food safety incidents or emergency situations. However, in two such situations, this primary objective was overshadowed by uncertainties associated with the source of the food vehicle causing the outbreak. In this case, extensive efforts were placed on tracing and risk assessments.</p>	<p>Our organisation has done well regarding the best practice of 'protecting consumer health as the primary goal in FSRC.'</p> <p>Precautionary measures can have their downsides, see the backlash from incorrect attribution to tomatoes in 2008 and cucumbers in 2011¹.</p>	<p>Knowing uncertainties are unavoidable in food safety outbreak investigations, we can improve future FSRC by perhaps emphasising this primary objective with a precautionary approach.</p>
<p>Principle 5: Competent authority's FSRC actively promotes awareness and understanding of food safety issues under consideration by all stakeholders, i.e., food safety is a shared responsibility among its stakeholders</p>	<p>A review of the FSRC activities conducted by our organisation in the previous 3 years indicates that we have been doing well in leading FSRC, the associated food safety education and information exchange, and consumer/public engagement. We have also done well in providing consumers with clear and timely information to protect them from foodborne illness. However, we have not specifically promoted food businesses, consumers, media and scientific institutions to take their share of responsibility in food safety.</p>	<p>'Food safety is a shared responsibility' is a relatively new concept. How to promote this to our stakeholders is new to the organisation's FSRC despite the obvious that food will be safer if all stakeholders are aware of their responsibilities in food safety management and communication.</p> <p>FAO and WHO started the promotion of 'food safety is everyone's business' in 2019. Some online media have picked up the message. It is yet to see competent authorities around the globe take steps to actively promote this concept.</p>	<p>The organisation's future FSRC activities should build in the promotion of 'food safety is a shared responsibility' to the public. It could be advantageous to collaborate with other APEC economies to gain momentum in the region.</p>

1. See Textbox 1 of the Framework. 



Guideline on Monitoring and Review of Competent Authority's Food Safety Risk Communication System

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on behalf of Food Standards Australia New Zealand



● INTRODUCTION

This is a general guideline for monitoring and review of food safety risk communication (FSRC) systems and the associated approaches developed and implemented by food safety regulatory authorities of APEC member economies (hereafter referred as 'competent authorities').



A competent authority's FSRC system generally comprises of the following:

- clear statement of the purpose of the FSRC system
- short description of the contribution of the FSRC system to the competent authority's overall objective
- list of high-level principles that guide the activities under the FSRC system
- list of stakeholder groups and how to keep them closely engaged, including transparency in disclosure of information to them
- description of key government authorities involved in FSRC and the associated coordination
- description of the operating mechanism of the FSRC system during a food safety emergency
- appropriate templates and standard operating procedures for communications during a food safety emergency
- appropriate templates and standard operating procedures for communications for food safety education and stakeholder engagement during everyday FSRC
- clear identification of personnel and work units and their responsibilities under the FSRC system
- scheduling to monitor and review the performance of the FSRC system, including regular reviews and updates of the FSRC system.

This Guideline provides specific recommendations on the last component of the FSRC system listed above.

The approaches associated with the competent authority's FSRC system may encompass the competent authority's stakeholder engagement strategy; the mechanism of coordination with various relevant government authorities; strategies for staff training and capacity building; social media policy and engagement strategy; and others. From here onward, the competent authority's FSRC system and the associated approaches are described as the competent authority's 'FSRC system'.

The purpose of monitoring and review is to maintain and improve the FSRC system's effectiveness, keep it current, and ensure FSRC from the competent authority reaches targeted stakeholder groups.

This guideline has been developed with the intention to complement existing guidelines developed by competent authorities of member economies on monitoring and review of their own FSRC systems.

This guideline links specifically to Principle 8 of the *APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework* (the Framework) which emphasises that

01 food safety risk communication is a progressive and iterative process

02 member economies should undertake continuous improvement of their FSRC systems

The process of monitoring and review is to designed to

- 1 find better ways to improve the effectiveness of two-way communication in food safety education and information exchange between the competent authority and the public and food industry
- 2 identify the needs to strengthen existing and develop additional communication skills within the competent authority, to meet communication demand during a food safety incident or emergency situation
- 3 identify alternative communication channels, and tools and methods, for example social media platforms to facilitate effective food safety risk communication in a timely manner, and
- 4 Others.

● Why is monitoring and review necessary?

The task of monitoring and review falls into the category of matters that are 'not urgent but important' (Covey S, Merrill A, Merrill R, 1994¹). Monitoring and review of FSRC system plays a pivotal role in the continuing success and sustainability of the competent authority's FSRC system. Owing to its non-urgent nature, this important task risks becoming forgotten or neglected unless prioritised.

WHO's training module 5 on risk communication during a public health emergency² indicates that monitoring and review is a continuous internal process for making sure that the activities under the risk communication programme/project are on track. The component of output evaluation of the risk communication is activity driven and the component of the outcome evaluation of the risk communication is change (consequences and impact) driven. Without regular monitoring and review and striving for continuous improvement, even the best FSRC systems will become outdated after a period of time. In this day and age of rapid advancement of digital communication (see *Guideline on Using Social Media Engagement for Food Safety Risk Communication*³) and fast information flow, it is especially important that monitoring and review of competent authority's FSRC system is conducted regularly.

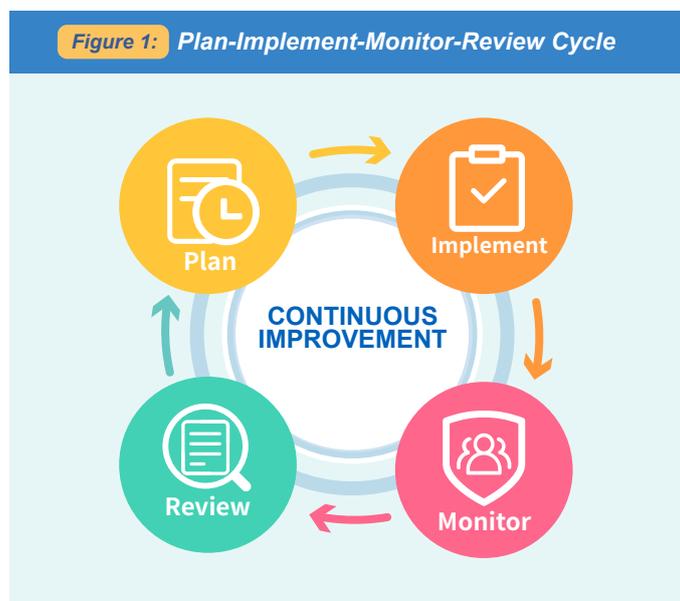
Monitoring and review during everyday FSRC and during crisis FSRC are captured by *the Guideline on Everyday Food Safety Risk Communication*⁴ and the *Guideline on Food Safety Risk Communication during a Food Safety Incident, Emergency or Crisis*⁵. These monitoring and review processes typically assess and improve the effectiveness of

-  communication messages
-  the coordination of and collaboration between relevant competent authorities
-  two-way communication
-  stakeholder engagement
-  dealing with consumer perceptions on food safety
-  tackling uncertainties associated with a food safety risk event

as well as a range of other issues that are specific to the communication event or activity.

• How to monitor and review?

Continuous improvement is a central part of performance management of a competent authority's FSRC system. The following Plan-Implement-Monitor-Review (PIMR) model (Figure 1) can be used to depict the cycle of the monitoring and review.



The PIMR cycle starts from

- developing a concept for the required changes or improvements following a review and evaluation (Plan)
- making the required changes (Implement)
- collecting data to assist the review and evaluation of the performance of various aspects of the FSRC system (Monitor)
- assessing the data collected against performance indicators to be achieved (Review).

A performance indicator or an indicator or a key performance indicator is a type of performance measurement. The section of Evaluation (page 43) of the WHO Strategic Communications Framework for Effective Communication provides a good coverage on how to create indicators to measure communication performance.

Relevant to this Guideline, performance indicators are designed to measure the performance of competent authority's FSRC system, i.e., the extent of the success or otherwise of the competent authority's FSRC efforts. The measurement can be qualitative, quantitative or a mix of both to describe, for example, the reach of competent authority's FSRC to specific stakeholder groups, the resulted behaviour changes of these specific stakeholder groups, and the overall impact of the FSRC effort on competent authority's stakeholder relations.

Monitoring and review of a competent authority's FSRC system should be conducted systematically and comprehensively.

Systematically means that monitoring and review follows a well-designed process of monitoring, review and evaluation to examine the performance of the key elements of the competent authority's FSRC system in an orderly manner.



Asking the right questions is one of the key strategies for a successful monitoring and review. It usually starts with a simple and general question, such as: 'Are we doing the right thing in FSRC?' This simple and general question can be drilled down to specific questions, for example 'What are the reasons of that media interview in September 2019 which did not go so well?' These specific questions can then lead to a summary of useful findings. The *Cabinet Implementation Tool Kit – 5. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review* listed under *Further reading* at the end of this guideline contains more useful information in this aspect.

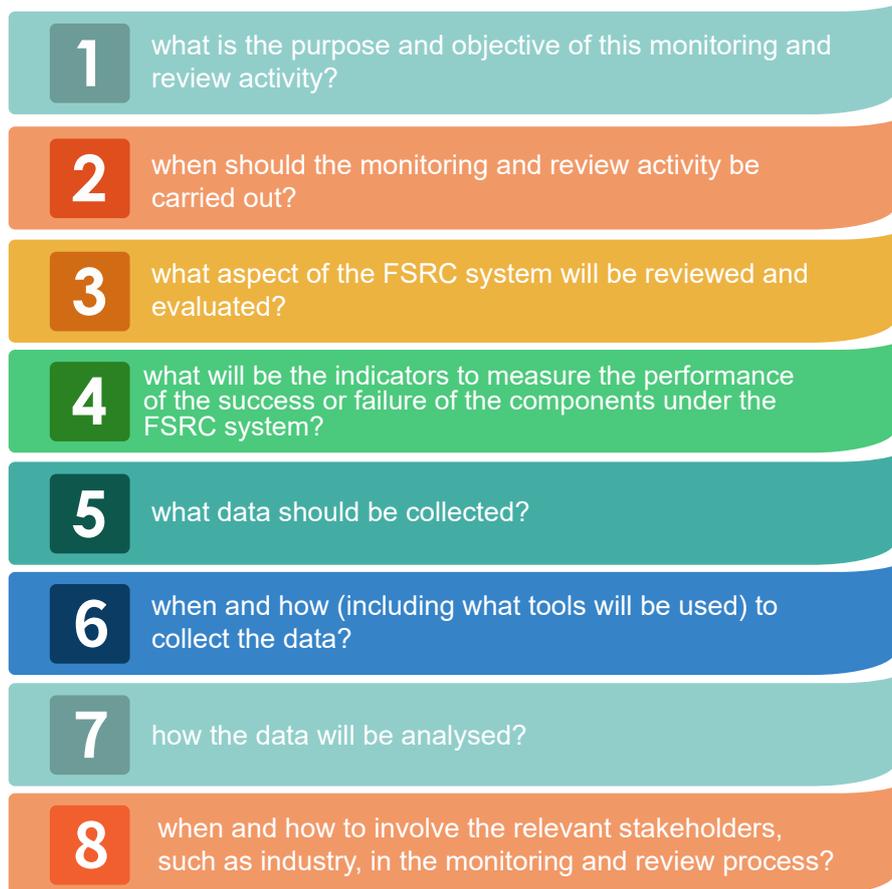
Table 1 (Appendix 1) presents a list of sample Guidance Questions for the monitoring and review of competent authority's FSRC system. Competent authorities of different member economies face different challenges at any one point of time due to differences in economic development, consumer attitude on food safety, previous food safety issues experienced, and current food safety issues faced by the competent authority. These result in different short term goals for different competent authorities. Because of these differences, it is recommended that individual competent authorities develop their own Guidance Questions and their own processes or protocols for monitoring and review to best suit their own FSRC systems and needs. While the Guidance Questions should be tailored to the competent authority's own FSRC system, these questions should ideally be aligned to international best practices in effective FSRC as reflected by the principles illustrated under the APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework.

Comprehensively means that the review and evaluation of the individual elements of the competent authority's FSRC system should be thorough, well-documented, and where appropriate the findings are published publically. These will enable monitoring and review to withstand critique by reputable third-party FSRC experts and various stakeholder groups.

Table 2 (see Appendix 2) provides a sample process that illustrates a comprehensive review and evaluation of the performance of the element of 'two-way communication' of a competent authority's FSRC system.

Key components of a comprehensive review and evaluation should ideally include:

- pre-planning the scheduled monitoring and review activity. Different from "Plan" under PIMR described under Figure 1, pre-planning refers to considerations of matters under the scheduled monitoring and review activity. Pre-planning should asking



- ensuring a good preparation for the review and evaluation. This involves appropriate data collection and appropriately designed questions. Making sure that data is appropriate includes consideration of feedback from surveys conducted during or after a specific food safety risk communication event; a reflection process, and also

consideration of knowledge gained from similar food safety events conducted by counterpart competent authorities. Technology development can be leveraged in data collection via the use of new tools such as social networking services and trend analysis. Social networking services are an online vehicle for creating relationships with other people who share an interest, background, or 'real life' relationships. Trend analysis, such as use of 'Google trend' analyses the popularity of top search queries under Google Search.



- identification and discussion of relevant issues such as data collection methods, and way to developing solutions
- Implementing the solutions
- recording of the findings and solutions, and identifying a timeline to revisit identified issues
- reporting the findings to the competent authority's senior management and the public.

Effective monitoring and review should include a written record, which describes the process taken and the key aspects of the system that have been assessed. The written record should identify key issues or shortfalls and improvements to be made to address the issues or shortfalls. The written record should also include a list of milestones and deliverables to ensure that improvements are able to be tracked and follow-ups are performed. Performance indicators are instrumental to the success of a well-planned monitoring and review.

Monitoring and review may involve an independent international food safety communication expert who is familiar with the economy's food safety regulation landscape to assist the review and evaluation. Monitoring and review may also involve participation of a panel of selected stakeholder groups to target specific aspects of the competent authority's FSRC system. The use of an expert panel offers a good opportunity to improve the competent authority's stakeholder engagement.

The monitoring and review process should also provide an opportunity to highlight the successful and effective aspects of the FSRC system. Success stories should be featured in the written record. Recording and communicating successes can help inform and guide FSRC of other competent authorities in the economy and within the APEC region.

Monitoring and review of competent authority's FSRC system should:

- reflect the competent authority's roles and objectives in food safety regulation (for example food standards development, or implementation, or compliance and enforcement of food safety regulatory measures)
- involve the organisation's executive (at least in the planning stage of the monitoring and review process)
- form part of the organisation's overall risk management strategy
- reflect international changing trend in food safety management, as well as the latest best practices in effective food safety communication internationally.

With respect to the final point, advancement of technology and the rapid pace of digital communication impact significantly on food safety management. Recent examples of such international changing trend in food safety management include digitalisation technology that has enabled food businesses to incorporate sensors in production lines to monitor some of the critical control points and X-ray inspection to enable improvement in traceability for sealed food products. To ensure that competent authority's FSRC system is current, monitoring and review should be aware of, and keep pace with any international changing trends in food safety management.



The first three points of the above monitoring and review list relate to the competent authority's function and performance management. The last dot point imparts a sense of environmental scanning that if conducted well, will enable the competent authority's FSRC system to keep up with the new challenges caused by the ever-changing communication and food safety management landscape.

In case of resource and time constraints, it is suggested that a systematic and comprehensive monitoring and review can target one or a limited number of aspects of the competent authority's FSRC system at a particular time. Bearing in mind, monitoring and review conducted needs to be practical. Sometimes a partial review and improvement is necessary to meet specific needs under circumstances. If so, monitoring and review in the subsequent years should systematically cover the remaining aspects of the FSRC system.

● How often should monitoring and review be conducted?

Monitoring and review is a resource heavy process. It requires staff time, a budget and buy-in from executive management. Monitoring and review should be conducted periodically subject to resource availability and the size of the competent authority. It is recommended that the competent authority's FSRC system is reviewed within 3 to 5 years after the system's initial implementation. Health Canada, for example, recommends an evaluation of the effectiveness of risk communication after one cycle of the risk communication effort has been completed. KPMG International Limited recommends performing a review of its quality management system every 3 years. It is additionally necessary to conduct monitoring and review immediately after any significant episode of food safety emergency communication.

● Conclusion

Monitoring and review plays a pivotal role in the continuing success and sustainability of the competent authority's FSRC system because it maintains and improves the competent authority's FSRC system's effectiveness over time.

To be most effective, a competent authority's FSRC system should be monitored and reviewed systematically and comprehensively.

It is recommended that the competent authority's FSRC system be reviewed 3 to 5 years after the system's initial implementation and after a significant food safety emergency or crisis.

● Acknowledgment

The preparation of the *Guideline on Monitoring and Review of Competent Authority's Food Safety Risk Communication System* was led by Hong Jin of Food Standards Australia New Zealand and Amy Philpott of Watson Green LLC. Contributions to the preparation of this Guideline were received from Steve Crossley (Food Standards Australia New Zealand, Australia); Jinjing Zhang (State Administration of Market Regulation, People's Republic of China); Tomotaro Yoshida (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Japan); Marcelo Valverde (Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism, Peru); Mary Grace Rivere-Mandigma and Alpha Lanuza (Department of Agriculture - Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Standards, Philippines); Megan Crowe (U.S. Department of Commerce); YiFan Jiang and Rachel Wong (Food Industry Asia); and Simone Moraes Raszl (World Health Organization).

• Further readings



Asia-Pacific Economic Corporation (2019) APEC Food Safety Modernisation Framework to Facilitate Trade



U.S. Food and Drug Administration (2017) FDA Strategic Plan for Risk Communication and Health Literacy 2017-2019



FAO/WHO (2016) Risk Communication Applied to Food Safety Handbook



International Standards Organisation (2015) ISO 9001:2015 Quality management systems — Requirements



Australian Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2013) Cabinet Implementation Tool Kit – 5. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1994) A Primer on Health Risk Communication Principles and Practices



Appendix 1

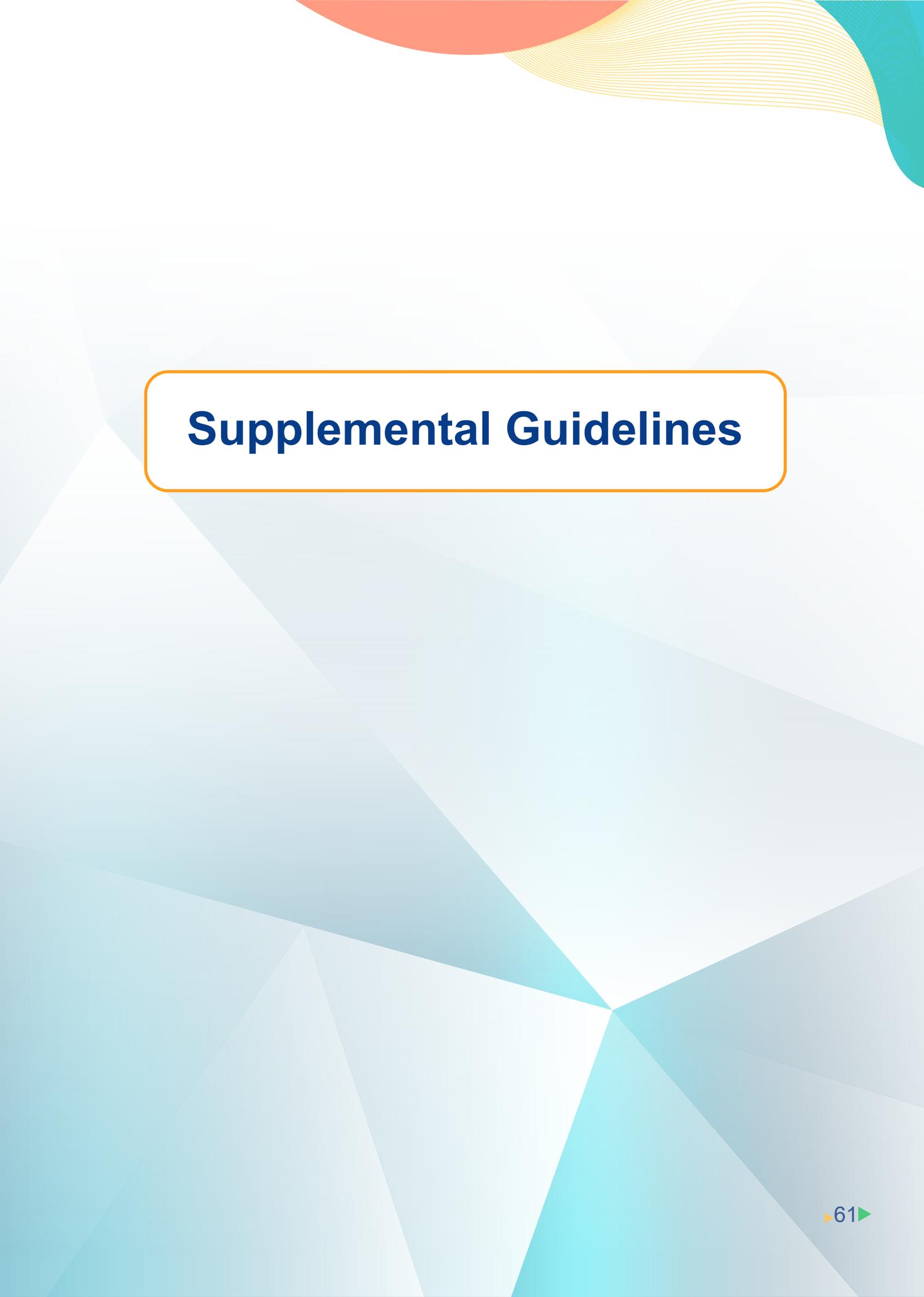
Table 1: Guidance questions for monitoring and review of competent authorities' FSRC systems

Objectives of the FSRC system	Sample questions to be asked in undertaking monitoring and review	Sample solutions and follow up questions
Protecting consumer health	<p>Has the FSRC consistently centred on and delivered the protection of consumer health over the past 3 years?</p> <p>Has the FSRC system fostered public trust and confidence in the safety of the food supply on all occasions over the past 3 years?</p>	<p>If yes, can improvements be made in future communications, and what are they? Can a list of improvements be compiled, and a realistic timeframe be set to reach the established milestones? How and when will these be monitored and reported? How will these contribute to fostering public trust and confidence in your organisation and a safe food supply in your economy?</p>
Ensuring transparency and timeliness	<p>Have all communications over the past 3 years under the FSRC system been transparent to all stakeholder groups and have they been made in a timely manner?</p>	<p>If not, what needs to be improved? How can future communications be improved? Can they be converted to a list of actions and an achievable timeframe be set to realise these actions? How and when will these actions be monitored and reported to the public?</p>
Two-way communication is always enabled (See Table 2 for a more in-depth evaluation)	<p>Have any of the communications over the past 3 years been incomplete in understanding stakeholders' views?</p> <p>Have our communications been interactive for both conveying the information from your organisation and for receiving feedback from the stakeholder(s)?</p>	<p>If yes, is there anything else that could be done to improve two-way communication? Can a list of actions be compiled, and a realistic timeframe be set to realise these actions? How and when will these actions be monitored and reported to the public?</p>
Providing credible information	<p>Was all information disseminated under the FSRC system over the past 3 years from credible sources and based on sound science and evidence?</p> <p>Have all the uncertainties associated with the food safety risks been acknowledged and communicated openly to the public over the past 3 years?</p>	<p>Can any improvements be made to ensure information communicated to the public is always from credible sources in future communications?</p> <p>Can any improvements be made to better handle uncertainties in future communication with the public?</p>
Promoting shared responsibility on food safety issues	<p>How did all parties involved perform regarding food safety as a shared responsibility in the period since the last review?</p> <p>Can the coordination between various government authorities be further improved to impart a one voice of government communication from a single recognisable source?</p>	<p>If improvements can be made, have the specific improvements been identified and documented?</p>
Being audience orientated and inclusive	<p>Have any stakeholder groups, particularly those who are most vulnerable to be affected by the food safety risks, been omitted from the communication over the past 3 years?</p> <p>Have our messages been made simple and clear to enable those stakeholder groups with low scientific literacy to understand the message?</p>	<p>If yes, why they were omitted and how will the competent authority take the vulnerable stakeholder group into consideration in future food safety risk communication?</p> <p>If not, how will efforts be made to convey food safety information in simple everyday expressions to cater for the stakeholder groups with low scientific literacy?</p>
Being consultative, consistent, systematic and preventative	<p>Have the food safety risk communications over the past 3 years met the criteria of information exchange with stakeholders being consultative, consistent, systematic and preventative?</p> <p>How well were the attitudes, values, practices and particularly perceptions of interested parties regarding food safety risks or hazards been addressed over the past 3 years?</p>	<p>If not always, why has this occurred and how will identification of the specific shortfalls be made, and what improvements will be implemented? Set an action plan to have them implemented.</p>

Appendix 2

Table 2: An Illustration of a comprehensive evaluation and review of the two-way communication component of a competent authority's FSRC system

Deliverables on two-way communication	Questions to be asked during the evaluation and review process	Outcomes and a schedule to follow up
Strive to be a good listener and to understand stakeholders' views	<p>Q1: How was this deliverable measured?</p> <p>Q2: Which year was the baseline established?</p> <p>Q3: Being the 5th year since this deliverable was set, how has the organisation performed against this performance indicator?</p>	<p>A1 & A2: The deliverable was measured qualitatively in comparison with a baseline established in February 2018 based on a survey. Each year, an improvement or maintain the status quo (performance indicator) is anticipated.</p> <p>A3: The organisation consistently met the performance indicator after 2 years of implementation of this deliverable.</p> <p>Record: This evaluation and review was made on 1 February 2021 with the presence of Janet (Communication Manager), Simon (Communication Specialist – Grade A), Mark (General Manager – Consumer Affairs), and Robert (independent Consultant – Capital Communications)</p>
Strive to ensure that communication on food safety matters is always a two-way process	<p>Q1: How was this deliverable measured?</p> <p>Q2: Which year was the baseline established?</p> <p>Q3: Being the 3rd year since this deliverable was set, how has the organisation performed against this performance indicator?</p>	<p>A1 & A2: The deliverable was measured qualitatively in comparison with a baseline established in March 2018. Each year, an improvement or maintain the status quo (performance indicator) is anticipated.</p> <p>A3: This deliverable falls marginally behind of the set target, i.e., a small improvement was achieved in 2019, but not in 2020 and 2021. A target has been set to ensure consistent improvement within the next 5 years. The target will be realised through Action 1).....; Action 2).....; Action 3) These actions will be reviewed 36 months from this date.</p>
Strive to always demonstrate empathy and pay attention to stakeholder concerns in food safety risk communication	<p>Q1: Being the 3rd year since this deliverable was set, what improvement in demonstrating empathy and paying attention to stakeholder concerns has been reached?</p> <p>Q2: How comparable was this deliverable of the authority with a counterpart authority in the APEC region (provided this information is available)?</p>	<p>A1: Surveys conducted in the 3 year period since this deliverable was set, indicates a significant improvement has been achieved in demonstrating empathy to stakeholder concerns.</p> <p>A2: This deliverable is comparable with those achieved by economy Y.</p>
Strive to build and maintain effective public engagement through food safety communication	<p>Q1: How was this deliverable measured?</p> <p>Q2: Which year was the baseline established?</p> <p>Q3: Being the 3rd year since this deliverable was set, what improvement in building and maintaining effective public engagement through food safety risk communication has been reached?</p>	<p>A1 & A2: The deliverable is measured qualitatively in comparison with a baseline established in April 2018 based on the results of two surveys conducted in 2018. Each year, an improvement or maintain the status quo (performance indicator) is anticipated.</p> <p>A3: Marginal improvement has been achieved after 3 years of implementation of this deliverable based on a survey conducted each year.</p>
Demonstrable improvement of public's trust in the economy's food safety regulatory system and the competent authority through food safety risk communication over a period of 3 years	<p>Q1: How was this deliverable measured?</p> <p>Q2: Which year was the baseline established?</p> <p>Q3: Being the 3rd year since this deliverable was set, what percentage of improvement in public's trust in the competent authority as a good food safety regulator has been reached?</p>	<p>A1 & A2: The deliverable was measured qualitatively in comparison with a baseline established in March 2016. Each year, an improvement or maintain the status quo (performance indicator) is anticipated.</p> <p>A3: Good improvement has been achieved on this deliverable after 3 years of implementation of the deliverable as a result of the establishment and conduct of 1) a yearly food safety roundtable involving representatives of all stakeholder groups to exchange views on food safety matters; and 2) a liaison group involving representatives of food retailers, food manufacturers and primary food producers which met 3 times a year to exchange food safety information and target food safety issues in high risk sectors.</p>



Supplemental Guidelines



Guideline on Food Safety Risk Communication during a Food Safety Incident Emergency or Crisis

Author: Amy Philpott
on behalf of Food Standards Australia New Zealand

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Guideline is to provide information regarding food safety risk communication (FSRC) from food safety regulatory authorities to the public during a food safety incident, emergency or crisis (generically referred to as events). This Guideline applies the eight Principles detailed in the APEC FSRC Framework (hereafter referred to as the Framework) to these food safety events.

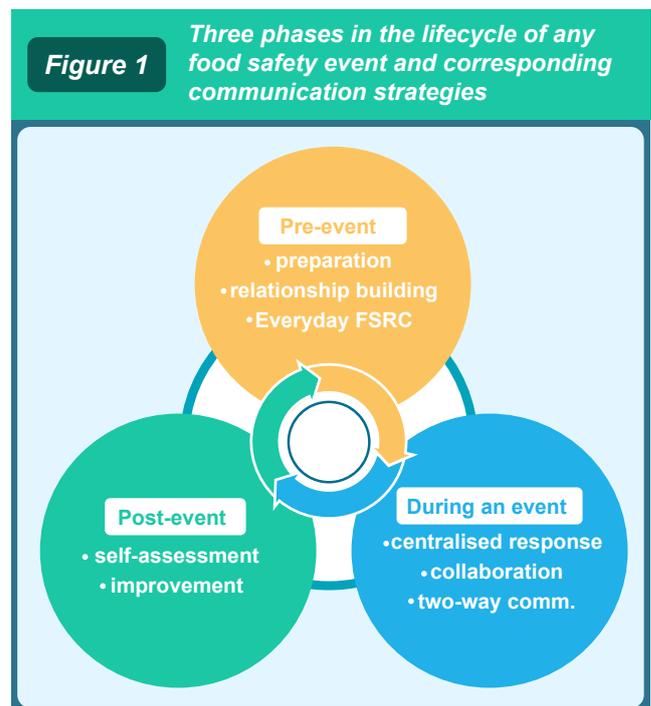
The lifecycle of any food safety event comprises pre, during and post phases. Figure 1 shows these three general phases of event response and examples of the corresponding FSRC strategies. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [summarises](#) the cyclic nature of crisis response with the statements ‘As the response progresses, available information and audience needs change. Communication demand, resources and strategies must adapt to meet the evolving needs.’

Throughout the three phases of a food safety event, the FSRC process is iterative and requires continual

improvement (Principle 8). Improvement requires regular monitoring of the food environment for potential events, which is part of the process of emerging issue identification (*Guideline on Everyday Food Safety Risk Communication*) and regular evaluation and updating of the FSRC plan (*Guideline on Monitoring and Review of Competent Authority’s Food Safety Risk Communication System*).

Before a food safety event (pre-event)

The pre-event phase of a food safety event occurs prior to the food safety event when a competent authority is operating under everyday conditions. This phase is crucial because the actions significantly impact how an organisation will perform during the other two phases. The pre-event communication strategies are centered around



internal preparation and relationship building, for example, establishing and testing communication protocols and investing in stakeholder engagement (*Guideline on Everyday Food Safety Risk Communication* [↗](#)).

Internal preparation during this pre-event phase is critical to success. Preparation includes developing a FSRC plan. It is also recommended to have a communication component in event specific plans such as recall plans, outbreak investigation protocols and food safety response during natural disasters.

Pre-event activity planning (Textbox 1) allows prompt response to a food safety event (*Guideline on Everyday Food Safety Risk Communication* [↗](#)).

As noted in Principle 5 [↗](#) of the Framework, various stakeholders share FSRC roles and responsibilities. Relationship building with these different stakeholder groups is critical to building trust and developing a single source of authoritative information on food safety practices, foodborne illness prevention and minimisation and crisis communications. While these efforts target various interested parties (Principle 6 [↗](#)) this Guideline focuses on relationship building between the competent authorities and the public, which requires building public trust (as defined in the Framework) in the competent authority. As explained in the Framework, public trust is created by communicating in a transparent and timely manner (Principle 2 [↗](#)), using a two-way communication process (Principle 3 [↗](#)), and disseminating credible information based on science and evidence (Principle 4 [↗](#)).

Textbox 1

Things to do before a food safety event:

- 1 Write a FSRC Plan
 - Identify core communication response team
 - Identify others who can help if a situation escalates (see next section)
 - Assign communication responsibilities
 - Identify likely audiences for likely food safety events
 - Establish a communication approval process
 - Identify audience-appropriate communication delivery channels suitable during a fast-paced event
 - Prepare to use those channels (i.e., if social media is a desired channel, establish a presence now. See *Guideline on Using Social Media Engagement for Food Safety Risk Communication* [↗](#))
 - Draft and test messages / communication materials
 - Identify and train spokespersons to deliver messages
- 2 Practice the plan annually
- 3 Update the plan as needed
- 4 Invest in stakeholder engagement / relationship building

● During a food safety event

When an event or potential event is detected, the ‘during an event’ response phase begins. According to the established protocols in the competent authority’s FSRC plan, the designated communication response personnel are activated. The event response is evaluated according to the competent authority’s response threshold (incident, emergency or crisis).

During this phase it is typical to:

- gather information
- assess the potential risks associated with the event and determine the corresponding communication response level
- identify event-specific communication needs of the affected segments of the public
- determine the message content, channels and form.

Information gathering

In the gathering information phase it is necessary to ensure an accurate and complete understanding of the event, regardless of the response level.

Textbox 2

Questions to ask in the early stages of a food safety event:

- What happened?
- What food is affected, and where and to whom was it distributed?
- Who is involved?
- Who is affected? Impact?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- Why did it happen (cause)
- How did it happen (root cause)?

As suggested in the *FAO/WHO Guide for Application of Risk Analysis Principles and Procedures during Food Safety Emergencies*  the communication team needs to work with those conducting the risk assessment and risk management (risk assessors and risk managers) to collect information. Questions can be used to seek information in the early stages of a food safety event (Textbox 2) while noting that, especially in the initial phase of an event, there can be many unknowns, and answers to some of the questions may not be available (communicating about uncertainties will be discussed later in this section).

One of the challenges includes identifying and understanding the diverse stakeholders and sectors of the public who might be affected by the event and want or need information. Based on an ongoing understanding of the event, it is necessary to determine potential health impacts on those with a high likelihood of exposure to the affected food. Once these stakeholders are identified, it is possible to develop messages that meet informational needs and identify the most effective communication delivery channels under existing circumstances. The relationship building carried out in the pre-event phase will help the competent authority make these decisions within the context of the targeted audiences' social and economic status and cultures and values.

Potential risks and communication response level

The communication response to a food safety event should be commensurate with the magnitude, or potential impact on public health. The appropriate response level depends on several factors. See Textbox 3 and *FAO/WHO framework for developing national food safety emergency response plans* and Heads of European Food Safety Agencies' *Guidelines for Management and Communications during Food and Feed Safety Incidents*. Each of these factors can contribute to the escalation of a food safety event.

As the event escalates, the FSRC response will require increasing amounts of resources, management involvement and coordination between relevant competent authorities and other major stakeholders. In this Guideline the various types of events - 'incident', 'emergency' and 'crisis' - are defined by the increase in risk to and impact on public health.

An incident is an event, whether accidental or intentional, that is identified by a competent authority as constituting a minor and (as yet) uncontrolled foodborne risk to public health requiring action to be taken to prevent adverse events. The competent authority may be able to handle the FSRC response to relevant stakeholders with minimal to no external agency assistance. As defined by Heads of European Food Safety Agencies'

Textbox 3

Factors used to determine the seriousness of a food safety event and the corresponding response effort:

- What food(s) are affected and how are they typically consumed?
- Effects on public health - the magnitude of adverse health implications and likelihood of being infected/affected
- Number of people/vulnerable groups affected
- Whether the cause is known or unknown
- Public perception of risk
- Media interest
- Coordination with others required to properly manage the event
- Food production and supply and distribution chain complexity.

Guidelines for Management and Communications during Food and Feed Safety Incidents, the ‘effects on consumer health may range from mild to requiring hospital care; public risk perception is low; media has limited attention to this incident, and the cause is known (i.e., mycotoxins, heavy metals, mold, and minor food poisoning, glass particles of a size that can be readily detected by the targeted consumers, ...).’

An emergency is defined as by Codex Alimentarius as an event, whether accidental or intentional, that is identified by a competent authority as constituting a serious and as yet uncontrolled foodborne risk to public health that requires urgent action. In an emergency situation, a medium to high number of consumers (as defined by the competent authority) will require hospital care and deaths may result; public risk perception is medium to high, and there is some media interest. The competent authority may require additional internal collaboration to address the event.



A crisis is defined as an event, whether accidental or intentional, that has been identified by a competent authority as constituting a very serious and (as yet) uncontrolled foodborne risk to public health that requires immediate action. This will cause serious public health consequences, hospitalisations and deaths. Many people will be affected, and the risk perception among the public will be high. A crisis will often be associated with notable economic impacts in the form of lost food business, lost productivity, lost trade and healthcare costs. A crisis also requires the competent authority to coordinate with other internal (within the same economy) and/or external (other economies) agencies to manage the crisis.

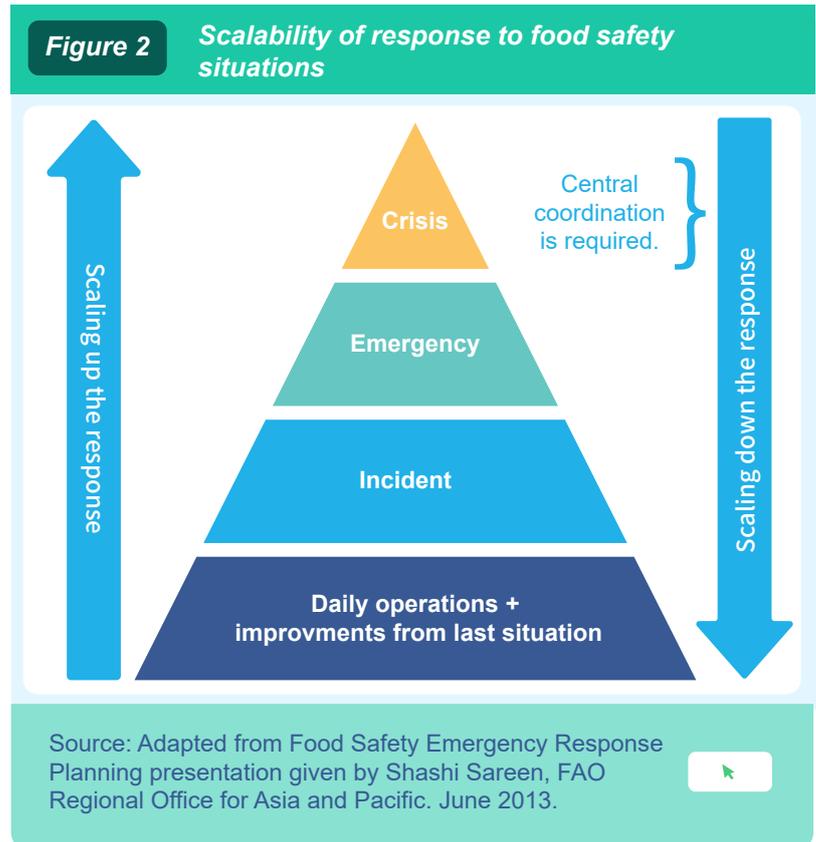


Some crises do not jeopardise public health but can still create a need for food risk communication because they threaten the public’s confidence in the food supply or in the competent authority, for example, in the situation of food fraud. Subject to regulatory responsibility, these non-food safety events can still trigger a competent authority’s crisis communication response. A competent authority’s

crisis/emergency response plan or protocol is inclusive of the FSRC plan. This Guideline is limited to FSRC under a food safety incident, emergency or crisis.

Responses to different food safety events are scalable (Figure 2). Any combination of the factors identified may result in an emergency or crisis. The final determination is dependent upon the competent authority's assessment of the situation and ability to respond. Once the competent authority has assessed the event's seriousness, it can best identify the response team(s) and needed resources.

Central coordination (Figure 2) is especially important during an emergency or a crisis. 'Central coordination' in this Guideline refers to deliberate engagement in an organised and coordinated FSRC response with the various competent and relevant authorities in a single economy, as well as with those of other APEC economies when applicable. This multi-agency coordination occurs across different disciplines, jurisdictions and government agencies. The different domestic and/or international competent authority sectors that may have roles and responsibilities in the food safety emergency or crisis response include:



- health
- agriculture and fisheries
- food/feed safety
- local authorities
- domestic reference laboratories
- trade (import/export) authorities
- sectors that liaise with industry, trade and academia.

Advice on how to implement central coordination is discussed in the *FAO/WHO framework for developing national food safety emergency response plans* [↗](#).

Communication goals remain the same despite the differences of the type of event, the response intensity or the authorities involved. The goals (Principle 1) are to protect consumers' health and foster public trust and confidence in the safety of the food supply.

Identification of communication needs of the audience

To best develop and deliver effective messages, it is necessary first to identify the public segments (also called audiences) most vulnerable to a specific event. The research carried out during pre-event phase, i.e., stakeholder engagement, allows anticipation of audience communication needs as they relate to food safety incidents, emergencies or crises.

Understanding different audiences' risk perceptions will also help develop salient communication messages. Everyday risk communication is particularly important in the process of understanding various audiences due to time limitations and pressures during an emergency or crisis. Everyday risk communication contributes significantly to a

competent authority's understanding of the public's diverse sectors and is foundational to communicating during a food safety event (*Guideline on Everyday Food Safety Risk Communication*).

Messages drafted in the pre-event phase should be reviewed and adapted to address current informational needs. These messages may require supplementation as the event develops. Messages are at the heart of communication and this Guideline addresses message content, delivery channels and delivery form.



Message content, channels and form

Message content

Message content should be driven by the target audience's informational needs. In its *Crisis + Emergency Risk Communication* (CERC) document, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention points out that different audiences will require different degrees of detail at various times throughout the event. While it is not possible to predict in advance the exact messages needed for a particular event, there

is a predictable progression of informational needs that can be used when drafting or updating messages.



During the initial phases of any food incident, emergency or crisis, competent authorities can use the credibility that was established during the pre-event everyday risk communication situations to garner the public's trust. To maintain that trust, messages should use easily understandable language to explain the risks and ramifications of exposure, how to minimise or avoid exposure, where to go for accurate and updated information, and what food safety regulatory authorities are doing to mitigate the risk. At the beginning of the event, messages are often similar across all sections of the public to meet immediate needs for accurate and timely information. As the event progresses, those who have already received the initial information begin to

look for more details about the ongoing or expanding risks. Messages should then be more targeted to address a particular audience's concerns. People want to know why and how the event happened. So messages need to be more detailed and offer background information on the event as well as information on minimisation and prevention of ongoing or expanding risks.

Message content should empower the targeted audiences to make decisions about risks and risk management. Messages should persuade people to take the preferred actions identified by the competent authority. Those preferred actions may include what to do if associated risks cannot be avoided or what to do to minimise or prevent the identified risks.

As the risk diminishes and the audiences no longer need or want information about the event, messages should promote continued vigilance among the public and transition to educate the public to be prepared for managing similar future risks.

Regardless of where people are along the informational needs continuum, message content must always be transparent. Messages also need to acknowledge and convey uncertainties associated with the food safety event without causing undue alarm or making false promises. Message content should be easily understood



and aim to prevent negative unintended social, nutritional or industry consequences. In summary, the message content must be unambiguous.

Timely and accurate communication messages are required because, in the absence of credible information, rumours can quickly control the public narrative, resulting in misinformation and causing alarm or even panic. This is particularly true when it comes to social media (*Guideline on Using Social Media Engagement for Food Safety Risk Communication* [↗](#)). It is important to develop messages that address uncertainty (Textbox 4). *FSANZ Risk Analysis in Food Regulation*, Section 5.5 offers more discussion on this topic. [↗](#)

Textbox 4

Tips for Communicating Uncertainty

DO:

- Acknowledge uncertainty
- Express empathy.
- Share what you know, do not (yet) know and the process(es) you are using to get answers
- Use consistent message content across all forms and channels

DO NOT:

- Make promises outside of your absolute control
- Use statements of hopelessness or helplessness
- Criticise people for feeling scared or denying there is a risk

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CERC: Psychology of a Crisis. 2019. Page 5-7.

Importantly, messages should also express empathy, which the Oxford Dictionary [↗](#) defines as ‘the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.’ This is done by acknowledging how affected public sectors feel about the incident, emergency or crisis. Empathetic messages acknowledge the fear, anxiety and dread that people may feel (CERC: Psychology of a Crisis. Page 5-7 [↗](#)). Researchers have studied the role of empathy in responses to persuasive risk communication and found that ‘empathy is a key mediator of the suasive effects of health messages.’ (Campbell RG [↗](#), et al. 2004). In some cases, people need to feel that the competent authority cares about their concerns before they will trust the authority’s risk information. The importance of empathy in risk communication is captured by former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt in the quote below.

“No one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care.” - Theodore Roosevelt

Message channels

The use of effective message channels is required to reach intended audiences. Even the most salient messages will not be effective if they do not reach the targeted audiences. When determining which channels to use, it is important to consider



timeliness and appropriateness for the target audience. It is typically more effective to use existing channels of communication to reach audiences during an event of any intensity rather than use channels with which the audience is not familiar. More than one delivery channel should be used to increase the chance that the messages will be heard, understood and acted upon. Websites, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, TV, radio, newspapers, direct mail, billboards, email and text apps are examples of message delivery channels.

Regardless of how messages are delivered, some or all of them should foster two-way communication between the food safety regulator and the targeted audience (Principle 3 [↗](#)). This two-way communication process allows the competent authority to listen to and capture audiences' feedback, monitor audience understanding of the messages, and modify the messages to meet changing communication needs.

The immediacy of the event and audience characteristics will also determine the appropriate message delivery channels. For example, it is unlikely that a printed flyer mailed through the postal service would be a timely way (Principle 2 [↗](#)) to communicate risk about a food safety emergency or crisis, as it would be too slow. On the other hand, social media is fast, but if the targeted audience comprises mainly people over 70 years of age, it may be more desirable to communicate via television or radio and the internet.

Message form

The physical form of the message content is dependent on the selected delivery channel. After developing the messages and choosing the appropriate delivery channels, communication messages must be distributed to the targeted audiences. The physical form is also known as 'tactics'. Tactics must be appropriate for the selected delivery channels. Examples of communication tactics include press releases, factsheets, webpage copy, text copy of social media posts, infographics, written statements, videos, Frequently Asked Questions flyers and (internal) talking points for spokespersons.

After these physical materials which contain the messages (content) are developed and approved they then need to be strategically distributed (via channels), thus engaging in risk communication with targeted audiences. The message content, channels and form should be regularly evaluated and modified as needed to ensure that the targeted audiences are receiving, hearing, valuing and acting upon the messages as intended.

● After a food safety event (post-event)

When the targeted audiences no longer need or want information about the event, it is time to move to the post-event phase. It is important to not neglect the post-event phase as it is key to improving the competent authority's FSRC. Resources need to be allocated for this phase, remembering that, in the aftermath of an event, response teams are often physically and mentally exhausted and behind on the projects and work that were put on hold to deal with the event.

This phase is often overlooked because it can be difficult to measure and evaluate FSRC efforts with the public (U.S. FDA [↗](#)). Despite the challenges, the competent authority should evaluate the communication performance, celebrate the successes and identify how to improve in the future. This strategy of self-reflection should result in updating the risk communication plan and strengthening the team's skills.

Debriefing with the response team(s) allows sharing of feedback and additional input from the team. The answers to the questions (Textbox 5) asked in the debriefing sessions will improve the FSRC plan and the competent authority's future responses and form part of monitoring and review (*Guideline on Monitoring and Review of Competent Authority's Food Safety Risk Communication System* [↗](#)).

Textbox 5

Debriefing Questions:

- Did the targeted audiences receive our messages?
- Did they understand them? If they understood them, did they find the messages of value in reducing risk and anxiety?
- Did the targeted audiences act upon the information that was provided to minimise food safety risk?
- How well did we maintain the public's trust in us?
- Do we need to rebuild or repair the public's trust in us?
- Did we effectively and efficiently coordinate with other agencies and within our own agency? What worked well and how can we improve inter- and intra-agency coordination?

● Conclusion

This Guideline presents a linear view of the before, during and after phases of a food safety event. However, in practice, events change quickly, and it is possible to move back and forth between the phases before finally moving through to the post-event phase and returning to daily operations and the pre-event communication response phase.

This Guideline also recognises that APEC member economies are in different planning and preparedness stages for a food safety event. As such, the document has provided response guidelines that competent authorities can use to further improve preparedness levels for events of varying intensity and impact on public health. The documents cited throughout the Framework and this Guideline provide crisis communication planning resources. Additionally, resources from the FAO and WHO and the International Food Information Council include communication tools and templates that can be adapted to different preparedness levels and events. Finally, central coordination should be applied to the FSRC process during an emergency or crisis.

● Acknowledgment

The preparation of the *Guideline on Food Safety Risk Communication During a Food Safety Incident, Emergency or Crisis* was led by Hong Jin of Food Standards Australia New Zealand and Amy Philpott of Watson Green LLC. Contributions to the preparation of this Guideline were received from Jinjing Zhang (State Administration of Market Regulation, People's Republic of China) and Yang Jiao (General Administration of Customs, People's Republic of China); Marcelo Valverde (Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism, Peru); Jun Cheng (Singapore Food Agency), Jarunee Intrastook (Ministry of Public Health, Thailand), Megan Crowe (U.S. Department of Commerce), YiFan Jiang and Rachel Wong (Food Industry Asia), Eleonora Dupouy (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), and Simone Moraes Raszl (World Health Organization).

• Further Reading



Canadian Food Inspection Agency (2021) Food incident response process



The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019) CERC: Psychology of a Crisis



The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2018) CERC: Introduction



The U.S. FDA (2017) FDA Strategic Plan for Risk Communication and Health Literacy 2017-2019



FAO/WHO (2016) Risk Communication Applied to Food Safety Handbook



International Food Information Council (2015) Food safety: a communicator's guide to improving understanding



Heads of European Food Safety Agencies (2015) Guidelines for Management and Communications during Food and Feed Safety Incidents



Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China (2011) 国家食品安全事故应急预案 National emergency plan for food safety incidents



FAO/WHO (2011) FAO/WHO Guide for Application of Risk Analysis Principles and Procedures During Food Safety Emergencies



Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (2011) Australia's National Food Incident Response Protocol





FAO/WHO (2010) FAO/WHO framework for developing national food safety emergency response plans



Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (2008) Strawberry tampering incident



Health Canada (2008) Lessons Learned Health Canada's Response to the 2008 Listeriosis Outbreak Executive Summary



FAO (1998) The application of risk communication to food standards and safety matters



International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) various publications on food safety risk communication (use the search term "risk communication")





Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation



Guideline on Everyday Food Safety Risk Communication

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• INTRODUCTION

This is a guideline for food safety regulatory authorities (hereafter referred to as 'competent authorities' on everyday food safety risk communication (FSRC) with the public. This guideline complements the existing FSRC guidelines developed by competent authorities of APEC member economies. It assumes that the competent authority has implemented, or is in the process of implementing, the APEC FSRC Framework (See the Guideline for *Implementation of the APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework* [↗](#)).



'Everyday' refers to times during which there are no food safety incidents, emergencies or crises. During this time, the competent authority can use the guidelines to proactively communicate with the public about important but non-urgent food safety risks and how to avoid or mitigate them. Everyday FSRC topics include, but are not limited to, new technologies, appropriate food preparation and hygiene, food fraud and chemical hazards. Everyday FSRC does

not typically attract the same degree of public attention as FSRC during a food safety crisis or emergency or incident. However, everyday FRSC is important because it works to protect public health and build public trust in both the competent authority and the economy's food safety regulatory system.

Depending on the topic, competent authorities will need to engage with various stakeholders and interested parties (Principle 6 [↗](#)) such as consumers and advocacy groups, food industry organisations and businesses, public health organisations, community groups, media, other relevant government agencies and stakeholders. This guideline focuses on a competent authority's everyday FSRC with the public.



consumers and
advocacy groups



food industry
organisations



public health
organisations

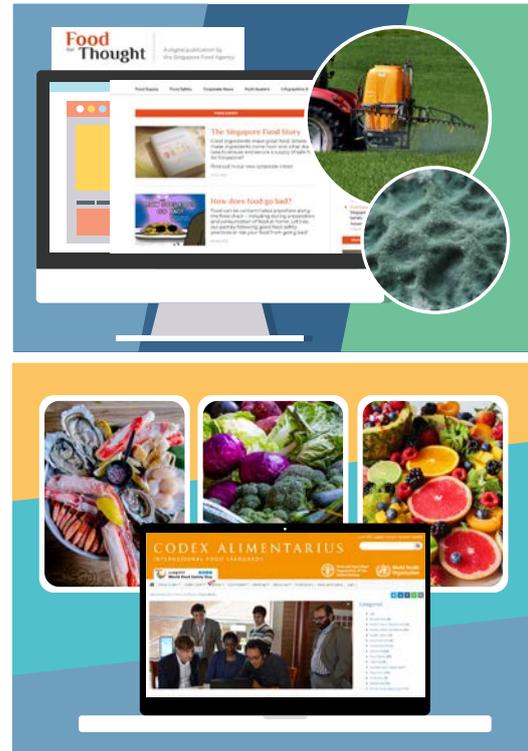


community
groups



media

Everyday FSRC protects public health by sharing information and promoting actions that prevent or minimise a potential risk from developing into a food safety crisis or emergency. For example, Singapore’s Food for Thought educational site provides readers with written materials and videos on pesticides, mycotoxins and food allergens; Chile’s Protect Yourself and Eat Healthy campaign raises awareness of the importance of ensuring food hygiene and the safe consumption of fish and seafood; the International Food Information Council addresses current everyday food safety topics in its Food Insight newsletter, and The Partnership for Food Safety Education promotes The Core Four Practices of food safety.



Everyday FSRC acts as the foundation for a competent authority’s risk communication responses to food safety crises and emergencies. The trust that a competent authority earns through everyday FSRC will increase the likelihood that the public will have confidence in and follow its crisis FSRC. In addition, everyday FSRC helps the competent authority to learn valuable information about its public that can then be leveraged during a crisis. As noted in the *Guideline on Food Safety Risk Communication during a Food Safety Incident, Emergency or Crisis*, everyday FSRC allows the authority to better understand its stakeholders, monitor issues and forecast changes in public perception of food safety matters. A comparison between everyday and crisis/emergency/incident FSRC is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Comparison between Everyday FSRC and Crisis/Emergency/Incident FSRC

Everyday FSRC	Crisis/Emergency/Incident FSRC
Goal is to protect public health (Principle 1)	Goal is to protect public health (Principle 1)
Primary objective is to prevent and minimise the likelihood of future occurrence of food safety incidents or crisis	Primary objective is to minimise the immediate negative impact on public health
Competent authority has time to conduct research and plan proactive campaigns	Competent authority has little to no advance notice and therefore research and planning must be done urgently or during everyday FSRC
Ongoing FSRC activities	FSRC activities have a beginning and an end based on the event
Addresses any food safety risk to the public that the competent authority determines to be important, for example, microbiological pathogen prevalence, aflatoxin, food allergens, safe cooking temperatures, new food technologies and more	Focuses on the food safety risk(s) related to a specific food safety event
Messages typically not focused on a specific warning or food safety issue. They are generally broadly applied. (e.g., 'wash fruit and vegetables before consuming to minimise risk of contamination')	Messages typically focus on avoiding negative consequences related to specific issues or events. (e.g., 'do not eat X because it may be contaminated with pathogenic <i>E. coli</i> which can make you ill')
Financial and human resources can be planned for and allocated	Extra financial and human resources are often unplanned for and must be 'found'
Builds credibility and public trust in the competent authority	Uses/relies upon the credibility and trust that is built up during everyday FSRC. If executed correctly, it can also contribute to the competent authority's earned trust

● Implementing everyday FSRC

Everyday risk communication starts with gathering information about the risk or issue of concern. The FAO document 'The Application of Risk Communication to Food Standards and Safety Matters' recommends that effective FSRC with the public follows a systematic approach. For each everyday food safety topic, the competent authority should:



gather background and needed information



determine the FSRC strategy



prepare and test the messages



disseminate the messages



evaluate the effectiveness of food safety messages and communication channels



Gathering background and needed information



In the 'gathering background' step, the competent authority determines the topic to be addressed in its FSRC campaign. If a competent authority is not sure which food safety topic(s) to address, it should conduct primary research (for example consumer surveys, interviews, focus groups and 'listening' on social media platforms) and/or secondary research (for example university studies, research papers and news reports) to determine which emerging food safety topics need to be addressed before they become an acute threat to public health.

Once a FSRC topic is identified, the competent authority gathers information about the scientific basis of the risks and uncertainties. It identifies the vulnerable or interested sectors of the public to be targeted; the targeted audiences perception of, and behaviours towards the risk; information the targeted audience needs and wants; and how (which channels) the targeted audience prefers to receive food safety information. The primary and secondary research methods mentioned above can also be used to gather this information.

It is especially important to understand stakeholders' risk perception. As illustrated in the APEC FSRC Framework, public perception of food safety, inclusive of attitude, behaviour, practices, knowledge and literacy, is influenced by prior education, information and engagement status. These factors can present challenges to everyday FSRC in providing accurate science and evidence based information that may differ from consumer perceptions. For best results, a competent authority must work to understand the target audience's motivations and full range of concerns about a topic.

The information gathered during this first stage will be the underpinnings for future everyday FSRC decisions and campaigns and it is critical that this step be well-thought out and planned.



Determining the FSRC strategy

Ultimately, every FSRC campaign aims to persuade the targeted public to follow the recommended actions that will avoid or reduce a particular risk. This will often involve behaviour changes in the targeted audience. Behaviour change is a complex multi-step process (Prochaska J & Velicer W, 1997 [▶](#)). Communication strategies aim to start where a targeted audience is along the engagement continuum, beginning with making stakeholders aware of a risk, providing information, promoting understanding of the risk and involvement in the solution, and, finally, accepting (or rejecting) the recommended action (see Engaging in the Australian and New Zealand Food Regulation System [▶](#)). Before trying to persuade behaviour change, the competent



authority should ensure that the public is first aware of and understands the issue and the solution, and that the solution is acceptable to the audience. An everyday FSRC strategy will vary according to the level of audience engagement. The common

feature of all everyday FSRC strategies is to build trust and strengthen the relationship between the competent authority and stakeholders.

Based on the information that was gathered about the targeted audience and where they lie on the engagement continuum, the competent authority will determine its primary communication strategy. Although one strategy may dominate the messaging, it is common (and often necessary) to use more than one strategy in a campaign.



Preparing and testing the messages

The primary communication strategy will drive the primary messaging. For example, if the primary communication strategy is to inform the audience, then a core communication message may begin with ‘Did you know undercooked meat can cause illness?’ If the targeted audience is informed and now looking to actively avoid the risk, the core message may be ‘Use this guide to ensure meat is cooked properly.’



Different stakeholder groups often hold diverse views on specific food safety topics and may be influenced by competing interests. Stakeholder engagement can help resolve these differences and any tensions between competing interests. Regardless of stakeholder interests, messages should be science-based (Principle 4 [▶](#)) and address the concerns identified in the ‘gathering information’ step. Messages should be audience focused and inclusive, taking into consideration the cultures, values, socioeconomic status and other factors such as food safety literacy, of the stakeholder groups involved (Principle 6 [▶](#)) because these factors tend to influence the level of understanding and perception of food safety risk.

Messages should also be transparent (Principle 2 [▶](#)) and describe how the risk was determined, the associated uncertainties and detail how risks can be monitored and how an individual can control or reduce risk as appropriate. This will require the competent authority to identify shared values and help individuals identify an approach that meets their values. It is helpful to express risk in several different ways

that may resonate with different individuals and their backgrounds. Messages that incorporate human stories instead of just statistics tend to be more interesting and salient to their intended audiences.

When preparing communication messages, the competent authority should recognise the emotional aspects of risk perception and incorporate empathy into the messages. It is important to recognise and incorporate stakeholder concerns in messaging, even if those concerns may not be science-based. Best practice message characteristics are exemplified in the U.S. FDA's online information [about genetically modified food](#), and on page 117 of the FAO's [Edible Insects - Future prospects for food and feed security](#).



Prepared messages should be tested for clarity, understanding and overall reach to the target stakeholders using a representative segment of the target audience. The use of focus groups and regional pilot campaigns are two of the ways that competent authorities can test messages before using them in a FSRC campaign.

One important general message that can be incorporated into any everyday FSRC campaign is that food safety is a shared responsibility (Principle 5 [↗](#)). All stakeholders including regulators, food business operators, consumers, food safety researchers, the mass media, NGOs, WHO and FAO play a role in food safety. This is highlighted in the 'Framework for Action on Food Safety in the WHO South-Asia Region' [↗](#) which calls for multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional collaboration of all stakeholders – governments, food business operators, consumers and academics across the food chain – to make food safety a long-term investment to meet these sustainable development goals. In 2020, the theme for World Food Safety Day established by the United Nations General Assembly and jointly led by WHO and FAO was 'Food Safety is Everyone's Business.' Regardless of the food safety topic, everyday FSRC efforts should always promote the concept of shared responsibility.



Disseminating the messages

There are two major components to message dissemination:

- 1 who delivers the message
- 2 how it is delivered to the targeted audience.

Insights into both components should be revealed in the ‘gathering information’ step.

The competent authority is the most obvious entity to deliver its messages. However, effective message dissemination uses many messengers. It is multi-directional, not just directed from technical experts to the audience, but also from the audience back to the experts. There are many ways that stakeholders can and should be used to disseminate food safety messages. Academics and scientific institutions can be

involved to advocate scientific benefits through research, publications and play spokesperson’s roles. Mass media, inclusive of social media platforms, can be encouraged to provide evidence based information to the public regarding food safety. Food business operators and the organisations and agencies representing them can reinforce messages that apply to the safety of their food products. Food business operators can also play an active role in recognising an economy’s competent authority’s leadership role in everyday FSRC by sharing its food safety education



messages. Competent authorities can actively coordinate and collaborate with these credible stakeholders to deliver everyday FSRC messages. The 2020 online event organised by the USDA Food Safety Inspection and Service, and also Chile’s Food Safety and Quality Agency’s creative approach to FSRC are some examples of innovation in leading everyday FSRC messaging.

Multiple communication channels should be used to deliver the messages to ensure maximum reach. These messages will vary depending on the targeted audience's preferences. The *Guideline on Using Social Media Engagement for Food Safety Risk Communication* includes examples of how social media can be used to share information and combat disinformation and misinformation. Other examples include, televised public forums with local opinion leaders, radio, billboards, community meetings, videos and printed materials. Regardless of the communication channels used, it is important to include those that promote two-way communication (Principle 3) between the competent authority and the targeted public and with other stakeholders who are helping to disseminate the message.



Evaluating the effectiveness of food safety messages and communication channels



Established evaluation criteria should be used to ensure that food safety communication messages are reaching the intended target audience. Monitoring and analysing feedback captured from traditional media and social media allows an understanding of how communication messages are being picked up and amplified. These metrics should correspond to the communication strategy used and tactics deployed. For example, 'clicks' on an online brochure may be used to

measure awareness but give no information regarding audience understanding. Audience understanding can be measured by methods such as surveys, interviews or a review of related questions received by a competent authority's consumer affairs desk.

Communication evaluation criteria should be pre-determined and included in the everyday FSRC plan rather than waiting until after the campaign to determine how success will be measured. The effectiveness of the partnerships and joint communication activities should also be measured. This might be measured by alignment on goals and objectives, comparative resources levels, or joint campaign metrics.

Continuous improvement (Principle 8) is vital to a competent authority's communication program, and this starts with evaluation to establish a baseline. If communication metric benchmarks were not achieved in any area, then the competent authority should identify ways to improve. For example, if objectives were not met due to lack of expertise, the competent authority may invest in capacity building, including

staff training. For example, a risk communication course [▶](#) is offered by the Joint Institute for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (JIFSAN). Other capacity building activities include, but are not limited to, visiting food manufacturing establishments, spending time in a similar competent authority to gain knowledge and skills in FSRC and joining an academic or regulators' network specialised in the field of risk communication.

● Conclusion

The 'everyday' time, as distinct to a crisis situation, allows the opportunity for competent authorities to reflect, plan for and implement strategies that will help improve the overall effectiveness of FSRC. Everyday FSRC also allows APEC member economies to regularly practice FSRC relevant skills and expand FSRC knowledge, which in turn promotes continuous assessment and improvement of FSRC systems (Principle 8 [▶](#)) (*Guideline on Monitoring and Review of Competent Authority's Food Safety Risk Communication System* [▶](#)). Everyday time provides the competent authority with the time to:

- engage with the public in a consultative, consistent, systematic, and preventative manner (Principle 7 [▶](#))
- review and learn from its past FSRC successes and failures
- align its FSRC approaches with relevant policy objectives
- assess, evaluate and learn from competent authorities in other economies
- modify existing FSRC approaches and develop and implement new approaches
- engage in capacity building activities.

This guideline recommends that each competent authority make food safety risk communication a high priority by investing adequate resources in everyday FSRC.

● Acknowledgment

The preparation of the *Guideline on Everyday Food Safety Risk Communication* was led by Hong Jin of Food Standards Australia New Zealand and Amy Philpott of Watson Green LLC. Contributions to the preparation of this Guideline were received from Sean Burgess and Frank Geraghty (Health Canada); Constanza Vergara and Claudio Canales Ríos (Chilean Food Safety and Quality Agency); Melva Chen (Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, Hong Kong, China); Marcelo Valverde (Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism, Peru); Jarunee Intrasook (Ministry of Public Health, Thailand); Megan Crowe (U.S. Department of Commerce), Janell Kause and Roxanne Smith (U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety Inspection Services), Kelly McCormick (U.S. Food and Drug Administration), and William Hallman (Rutgers University); YiFan Jiang and Rachel Wong (Food Industry Asia); and Simone Moraes Raszl (World Health Organization).

● Further Reading



FAO (2021) Looking at edible insects from a food safety perspective



WHO (2020) Framework for action on food safety in the WHO South-East Asia Region



Food Industry Asia (2020) Food Risk Communication Field Guide I: Traditional Food Risk Communication



Food Industry Asia (2020) Food Risk Communication Field Guide II: Modern Food Risk Communication



Chilean Food Safety and Quality Agency (2019) Education tools created by ACHIPIA and Teatro de la Inocuidad – Tarea de Todos y Todas
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPvLyVRJa2c>



The European Food Safety Information Council (2017) How to communicate food risk? A handbook for professionals (eufic.org)





Food Regulation Standing Committee (2016) Engaging in the Australian and New Zealand Joint Food Regulation System



FAO/WHO (2016) Risk Communication Applied to Food Safety Handbook



International Food Information Council (2015) Food safety: a communicator's guide to improving understanding



FAO (1998) The application of risk communication to food standards and safety matters (fao.org)





Asia-Pacific
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Guideline on Using Social Media Engagement for Food Safety Risk Communication

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on behalf of Food Standards Australia New Zealand



• INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guideline is to provide general guidance on social media engagement by food safety regulatory authorities regarding food safety risk communication (FSRC) to the public. The intention is to supplement the existing communication plans and social media engagement guidelines developed by individual APEC member economies' food safety regulatory authorities (hereafter referred to as 'competent authorities').

The public obtains information on food safety and risk through many different communication channels, including media such as television, radio, newspapers, and online resources such as search engines and the websites of trusted organisations.



Newspapers



Television



Search engines



Radio



Websites

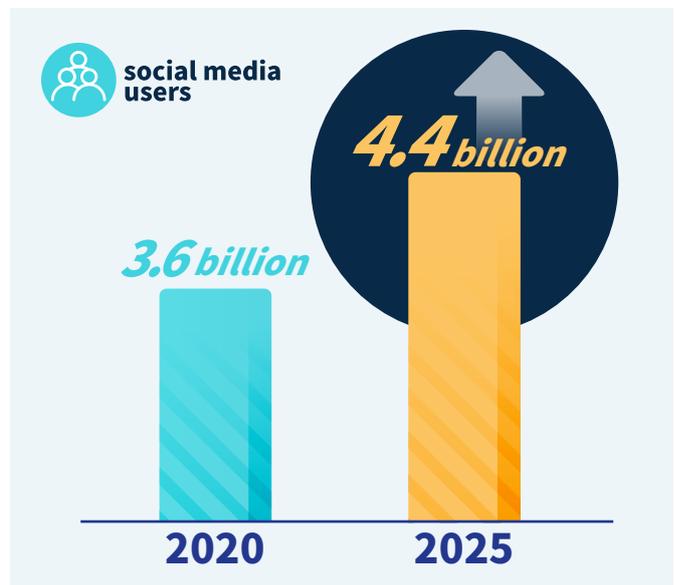
Social media is also a source of food safety and risk information (Kuttschreuter M et al., 2014 [↗](#)), although limited studies have reported on the use of social media to communicate risk information on food safety (Overbey K, Jaykus L, Chapman B, 2017 [↗](#)). The Oxford Dictionary [↗](#) defines social media (treated as a singular or plural noun) as 'websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking'. A key element of social media as compared to traditional media is the exchange of content created by users.





Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, Twitter, WhatsApp, WeChat and YouTube are some of the most popular social media platforms. While valuable risk communication tools in their own right, social media platforms are most effective when used alongside more traditional communication channels (Kuttschreuter M et al., 2014). For example, digital advertising on Facebook can be a cost-effective marketing tactic to amplify food safety risk communication messages.

Social media offers advantages in delivering food safety risk messages because of its extensive reach, high interactivity and real-time, user-generated content. In recent years, social media has become widespread, allowing extensive worldwide connections. In 2020, there were 3.6 billion social media users across all age groups, and that number is expected to increase to 4.4 billion by 2025, according to Statista. The increase is being driven by the rapid proliferation of smartphones.



When used effectively, social media delivers timely information (Principle 2), enables two-way (Principle 3) and multi-way communication, facilitates a shared responsibility for food safety (Principle 5), is audience-oriented, inclusive and consultative (Principles 6 and 7), and aids the iterative process and continuous improvement (Principle 8). For these reasons, it is beneficial for competent authorities to invest resources and develop internal capacity to use social media platforms to meet the communication needs of their target audiences (Chapman B, Raymond B, Powell D, 2014).

• Selecting social media platforms

By engaging the public through social media, personnel tasked with risk communication can provide accurate and timely information to help mitigate the social amplification of false or misleading information on food safety. To achieve this, communicators (meaning the competent authority's personnel responsible for developing its food safety risk communication strategies and executing the corresponding activities) must know where consumers are looking for food safety risk information on social media (Kuttschreuter M et al., 2014 [↗](#)). It is important to determine the relative effectiveness and appropriateness of the different types of social media platforms and develop an approach to monitor and evaluate platforms for quality and reliability for food safety risk communication (Moorhead S et al., 2013 [↗](#)).

To select the most effective and appropriate social media platforms, it is necessary to consider:



target Audience



type of content



capability



Target Audience

The best social media platform for a competent authority to use is the one that is most commonly used by the targeted audience. Focusing on the targeted audience (Principle 6 [↗](#)) will allow identification of the social media platforms most commonly used and therefore the best choices for competent authority's use. The proportion of the population that accesses news on social media ranges from less than 50 per cent to more than 75 per cent and varies by member economy (Statista [↗](#)). A simple way to learn who uses social media to get food safety news in a particular economy is to visit different social platforms and search for food safety topics and record who is engaging in these conversations and their level of engagement, (Caselli-Michael L, 2015 [↗](#)). Another way to learn about who uses social media platforms to obtain food safety information is to utilise social and behavioural research evidence. This same research can be used to better understand consumers' food-related behaviours and help develop and evaluate the efficacy of approaches and interventions designed to influence and change consumers' food related behaviours.

Demographic data for platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Snapchat and YouTube are available on each platform. These data will help determine if the targeted audiences participate in the social media platforms under consideration. This information can be used to determine the channels that are popular among particular audiences. It can also be helpful to observe which social media platforms other economies are using. It is not recommended to base the selection of a social media platform on novelty alone but to consider whether it reaches the target audiences and meets their communication needs.



Type of content

The type of available content influences the choice of social media used to communicate food safety risk messages. Content that performs well on one platform does not always translate well to another. For example, platforms such as Twitter and Facebook thrive on users sharing articles and are thus ideal for curated content and link sharing. If a food safety risk communication message is video-driven, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram offer robust features for videos, such as live video streams or Instagram TV (IGTV). Visuals of any kind, i.e., photos, graphics, or videos, are essential to the success of any social media platform.

If sharing photos or custom graphics such as infographics is at the centre of a social media strategy, Instagram or Pinterest may be the best primary platform (Chen J, 2021). The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO Social Media Policy) and scientific journal articles such as FOOD 2020 #Healthy: smart digital food safety and nutrition communication strategies - a critical commentary published in NPJ Sci provide descriptions of various social media platforms and their

uses. Figure 1 (The Pixel) illustrates how the same message can be manipulated to fit the different social media platforms.





Capability

Regardless of the social media platforms used, a critical factor is that the competent authority has the capability including resources, skills, knowledge and capacity, to adequately engage with its audiences on each social media platform that it uses. It is important to include social media in self-assessment (see *Guideline for Implementation of the APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework* [▶](#)), taking into consideration the authority's capability when selecting which platforms to use. It is commonly recognised among social media communicators that it is better to have a strong presence on fewer platforms than to not engage sufficiently on many platforms. If there is doubt about how many accounts can be effectively managed, it is advised to start with fewer and add others later.

● Developing a social media policy

A social media policy is generally developed after researching the social media platforms that best suit the targeted audiences, the type of content to be promoted and the competent authority's capabilities. Social media language use, and the laws that apply to its use, vary from member economy to member economy. A social media policy should establish clear rules for using a competent authority's social media accounts on various platforms. Such a policy needs to be consistent with the competent authority's communication policies and should identify the competent authority's social media goals, the criteria for creating its 'branded' platforms and rules for managing personal, as compared to organisational, social media accounts. The term 'branded' in this case refers to a competent authority's visual presence, including logo, fonts, colours and other style guide elements. The social media policy may also provide tips, tutorials, workshops, and other training resources to use each social media platform effectively and identify who is responsible for search engine optimisation (SEO). A detailed discussion of SEO is beyond the scope of this Guideline. However, scholarly articles and online resources suggest tactics that require little to no technical expertise but have a substantial impact on SEO (Schiro J et al., 2020 [▶](#)).

A social media policy should establish a social media style guide that dictates the visual appearance of the competent authority's official social media accounts. An example of how this might be done can be found in this media article Hootsuite *How to Create a Social Media Style Guide for Your Brand (Free Template)* [▶](#).

A social media management tool, or central dashboard, is useful to organise all social media accounts in one place and a social media calendar program will save time by scheduling posts in advance. Media articles such as Hootsuite *How to Create a Social Media Calendar: Tips and Templates* [▶](#) give guidance on how to create a social media calendar. Social media policies vary in length and detail, depending on each competent authority's needs and resources.

Textbox 1 shows key information that should be included in a social media policy, summarised from the most common components of social media policies developed by Canada [↗](#), CFHI [↗](#), FAO [↗](#), U.S. FDA [↗](#), FSANZ [↗](#), JapanGov [↗](#) (websites) and UNESCO [↗](#).

Textbox 1

Information to include in a social media policy

- Purpose of the policy and role of social media in achieving communication goals.
- Roles and responsibilities to create and maintain each platform. Include who must approve the use of a social media platform and subsequent messaging/posts.
- Requirements for creating social media accounts (i.e., strategic rationale, platform strategy and plan, metrics, social media management tool and design).
- Policies or statements about ethics, intellectual property rights, correction of errors and managing offensive comments, records management, correction of errors, privacy policy and compliance with applicable laws.
- Tips for using each platform and a list of training resources.
- Rules for managing personal versus organisational social media accounts.
- Backup plan if your account or platform goes offline.

Finally, there may be times when a social media account or even an entire platform will go offline, such as during a disruption in telecommunication or internet services, online vandalism by hackers, political pressures or regulatory limitations. Regulatory authorities should have a backup plan, and social media should be part of a larger communication plan that does not rely too heavily on any one communication channel. For example, in mid-February 2021 Facebook shut down its platform in Australia because it did not like the economy's proposed new media regulations. The shutdown interfered with competent authorities' effort to inform the public about bush fires. In this case, other channels had to be used to communicate to affected target audiences.

• Using social media

Social media platforms have many different uses in the strategic communication process, including:



audience research



environmental monitoring



program evaluation



storytelling



building trust



Audience research



As previously noted, the foundation of effective FSRC is understanding target audiences. When using social media as a communication tool it is important to remember that people are essential in this process. Facebook is a social media platform, but the users make up the social network by which food safety risk information is generated and exchanged. The users of a social media platform make up the target audience, not the platform itself. That is why developing targeted risk communications, particularly to ‘at risk’ groups, is critical to protecting them from food safety risks (Health Canada, 2018 [↗](#))

Competent authorities can engage directly with audiences using the social media platforms selected, and because the content is user-generated, it offers authorities the unique opportunity to listen to real-time online conversations among target audiences, the media, opponents and the wider community.

These multi-directional conversations provide insight into audiences and the users and messages that influence them. Social media can help competent authorities understand audience characteristics such as food safety knowledge, values, and behaviour (Zhang Y et al., 2018 [↗](#)).



This ‘social listening’ involves tracking social media platforms for mentions and conversations related to food safety hazards and the associated food commodity and then analysing this data to learn about audience perceptions and behaviour, inclusive of how food safety risk information is being shared. Formal research can also be conducted if time and resources allow. For example, questions

about social media use can be included in a Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAP) survey (Mayer A & Harrison J, 2012 [↗](#)).

Social media is a powerful monitoring tool that authorities can use to learn whether audiences hear, understand, and act upon food safety risk communications. Proactive marketing activities through social media can be used to promote foodborne illness prevention behaviours.



Environmental monitoring

The benefits of social listening go beyond just understanding audiences. Social media can also be a data source for foodborne disease surveillance, which is vital in the pre-event stage discussed in the *Guideline on Food Safety Risk Communication during a Food Safety Incident, Emergency or Crisis* [↗](#). In recent years, social media has been used as a surveillance tool (Chapman B, Raymond B, Powell D, 2014 [↗](#)).

In 2013, the Chicago Department of Public Health in the United States partnered with its civic partners to launch FoodBorne Chicago (Harris J et al., 2014 [↗](#)), a social media foodborne illness surveillance app that tracks Twitter messages to identify and investigate possible foodborne outbreaks. In a 2014 study, researchers screened customer restaurant reviews on Yelp for keywords related to foodborne illness. When information from Yelp



reviews was compared against foodborne outbreak data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) it was found that foodborne illnesses reported by Yelp reviewers closely matched up with official CDC statistics (Nsoesie E, Kluberg S, Brownstein J, 2014 [↗](#)). A similar effect may be found in grocery and restaurant e-commerce where customer reviews can contribute to food safety monitoring.

These types of collaboration between public health professionals and the public via social media could improve foodborne illness surveillance and response.



Program Evaluation

Most social media platforms and dashboards include analytical tools and online polls that can be used to analyse social media engagement. Dashboard examples are discussed on Klipfolio [↗](#). Measurement of audience involvement and two-way communication between the competent authority and its audiences are elements that are essential to



successfully communicating food safety risk messages. Similar to other communication channels, successful social media engagement does not solely rely on the size of the audience but also considers audience participation. Using tools such as Twitter polls and reviewing how many likes, shares and comments specific posts generated gives valuable information about the impact of food safety risk messages.



Storytelling

Storytelling is a powerful communication tool, and social media is an effective storytelling vehicle. At a time when social media users are inundated with a flood of information on numerous platforms, storytelling must be compelling to engage the audience and start a successful conversation. Information regarding digital storytelling can be found in the FAO Social media guide [↗](#).

Storytelling can be achieved through the words of individuals who do not talk directly about competent authorities but who talk about their personal experiences about food



safety risks. For example, researchers and scientists who work for competent authorities can explain, in layperson language, how their work benefits the public. First-person narratives are more convincing than directives, and a combination of videos and photos tell a better story than written words only. The FAO guide *Telling the #ZeroHunger Story* gives examples of how to apply these practices.



Building trust

The primary goals of APEC member economies' FSRC systems are protecting consumers' health and fostering public trust and confidence in the safety of the food supply (Principle 1). Audiences engage with those they trust (Huber B et al., 2019). For successes in communicating food safety on social media, competent authorities need to build trust with audiences on social media. Previous public opinion surveys have shown that the public trust health professionals and government authorities more than any non-governmental groups (Edelman).



In 2020, with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, public trust in food safety and the organisations that communicate them fluctuated (Edelman Trust Barometer 2021). The International Food Information Council reported in May 2020 that U.S. consumers had a high level (23%) of concerns about the safety of the foods that are available for sale in the United States. By June 2020, such concerns had dropped (16%). Economies should be aware that a long-term change in public confidence in the safety of food supply could have a corresponding effect on public trust in food safety risk communications from competent authorities.

An international study surveying ‘trust in science’ and ‘social media news use’ showed a positive relationship between social media sources and trust in science across the 20 different societies surveyed (Huber B et al., 2019). A March 2020 study investigating consumers’ awareness, trust, and usage of social media in communicating food safety news in Malaysia showed that respondents tended to trust information shared by scientists (67%) and family members and friends (33%). This would suggest that an effective social media strategy could target family members of the target audience through posting articles, sharing tweets or linking to blogs written or shared by scientists. Proactive dissemination of science and evidence based food safety information through social media platforms is a good practice to mitigate the spread of misinformation on social media (Soon J, 2020).

When building trust through social media, as in other media channels, a competent authority must be transparent and consistently communicate science-based messages that are timely, accurate and easy to understand. A competent authority should then repeat these same messages throughout all communication channels, including on social media platforms. Information should also be designed and released in ways that are considerate of culture, value, ethics, food safety



technical understanding, literacy levels and pre-established risk perceptions. When used correctly, social media is an effective tool to build trust with audiences and promote credible food safety information based on science and evidence.



• Responding to misinformation and disinformation

The attributes that make social media an effective communication channel, such as high engagement levels and instant, two-way communication, also make it an effective tool for spreading false information. Misinformation is false, inaccurate, or misleading information that is communicated regardless of an intention to deceive (Oxford Dictionary [↗](#); Wikipedia [↗](#)). It may be generated and spread unknowingly by repeating logical fallacies based on anecdotal evidence, or by false attribution or oversimplification. Disinformation is false information given deliberately (Oxford Dictionary [↗](#); Wikipedia [↗](#)). Neither misinformation nor



disinformation is a new phenomenon, but social media amplifies the ability to spread false information faster and further than ever before. This means that it can be very difficult to retract errors or correct untruths before audiences have spread them well-beyond the original recipients. By the time an error or untruth is detected, many people may have already received it and even acted upon it.

It is important for competent authorities to develop a social marketing strategy to support proactive dissemination of credible food safety information (Principle 4 [↗](#)) on a regular basis across social media platforms. It is also necessary to repeat this accurate



information many times and ensure prompt response in correcting misinformation on food safety risk. Consumers also have a role to play to educate themselves on whether information is true before they share or post on social media. Competent authorities can support this role by leveraging social media as a learning tool. There is clearly an opportunity for public education to help consumers fulfil their responsibility as partners in ensuring food safety.

Social media users around the world are concerned about false and misleading information. In a 2020 study, respondents in the United States, Philippines and Australia cited Facebook as the platform on which they were most concerned about receiving false or misleading information. Respondents in Chile, Malaysia and Mexico named WhatsApp and other messaging platforms as those of most concern. Respondents in Japan were most concerned about Twitter, and respondents from the Republic of Korea were most concerned about YouTube (Reuter Institute [↗](#), page 20).

There may be occasions in which a particular group or entity may seek to discredit a competent authority. To combat these efforts, it is important for competent authorities to take an active role in policing and managing official online persona. Disinformation is particularly difficult to combat when there is an element of truth that makes it believable even to social media users who do not want to spread false information. A 2020 study (Pennycook G et al. [↗](#), 2020) suggests that reminding people to think about accuracy before sharing information is a simple way to improve choices about what to share on social media. This study found that this simple intervention nearly tripled the level of truth discernment in subsequent sharing intentions. Competent authorities can also work with social media platforms to help counter wrong information. For example, since the outbreak of COVID-19 Instagram has produced a publication Keeping People Informed, Safe, and Supported on Instagram [↗](#) to help people access accurate information about COVID-19 outbreaks. These sorts of approaches may also be effective for combating food safety risk misinformation.

When reacting to erroneous information on social media, a competent authority can create a new post that rectifies the incorrect information, advises the public not to share unverified information, and encourages the public to refer to a credible, official source for accurate information. Following such a post, some people may post negative comments. The competent authority should evaluate the public comments within the situational context and determine whether responding to them will lead to looping arguments that cause more harm than good.



• Social media as a FSRC tool: examples & resources

Many food safety regulatory authorities in the APEC region use social media in everyday communication, and also during crises to effectively and efficiently engage with targeted segments of the public. Some authorities also provide messaging resources to social media influencers for sharing with others. Chile's National Food Safety and Quality Agency (ACHIPIA), developed Risk communication: creativity as a resource for change of eating habits [▶](#) to improve its food safety education and communication with a focus on the management of public perception of food safety and food safety outreach through social media. The U.S. Food & Drug Administration provides food safety resources such as the Social Media Toolkit: Eating and Cooking Outdoors [▶](#) to share with consumers. Similar social media resources are also available with messages specific to National Food Safety Education Month [▶](#). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States provides social media tools and educational materials such as Social Media Graphics [▶](#) and sample Facebook and Twitter messages that raise awareness about food safety and foodborne illnesses. The Partnership for Food Safety Education provides educational material such as Partnership for Food Safety Education Social Media Content [▶](#) that can be shared on social media. The Government of Canada produces The Science of Health Blog [▶](#) that promotes the work done by scientists, including those who work on food safety.

It is generally agreed that the benefits of using social media to communicate food safety messages outweigh potential drawbacks. Food safety risk communicators should consider undertaking regular professional development in this area in order to best communicate credible, science and evidence-based messages to protect public health.

• Conclusion

When selecting social media platforms, a competent authority should consider the target audience, type of content and competent authority's capability.

Competent authorities should develop a social media policy to establish clear rules for using a competent authority's social media accounts on various platforms.

Competent authorities can also use social media for audience research, environmental monitoring, program evaluation, storytelling and building trust. Misinformation (false,

inaccurate, or misleading information that is communicated regardless of an intention to deceive) and disinformation (deliberately misleading or wrong information) present unique challenges for food safety risk communicators. Competent authorities should ensure the information that they communicate is science-based, accurate, and free of errors.

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● Additional resources

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Guideline on Food Industry Food Safety Risk Communication

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• INTRODUCTION

This guideline complements and reinforces existing food safety risk communication guidelines developed by or for the APEC region’s food industry. It addresses food safety communication needs of the multi-sectoral industry from primary food production to food manufacturing, distribution and services. The focus of this guideline is on an industry ‘strategic food safety risk communication (FSRC) plan’. It is recommended that industry organisations and food business operators throughout the supply chain familiarise themselves with the five other guidelines and the Industry Annex developed under the APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework to augment their knowledge in FSRC. It would be ideal for the industry to adopt the other guidelines and the Industry Annex developed under the APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework into their individual strategic FSRC plans.



Food business operators and organisations should use a strategic FSRC plan to identify food safety communication needs and assign relevant resources. A plan helps to ensure that the food safety communication activities support the goal to protect public health (Principle 1 ▶). Strategic communication planning involves four steps:



Research



Analysis



Communication



Evaluation



Research

Research helps define food safety risk challenges and assists in understanding the intended audiences and identifying desired behaviour changes. Only then is it possible to develop and deliver effective communication messages that are intended to encourage the desired behaviours and increase food safety knowledge and/or change food safety attitudes (Principle 6 ▶). Research helps affirm or dispel assumptions that we make about audiences and their perceptions.



The most appropriate research methodology depends on the outcome of a baseline self-assessment (see *Guideline for Implementation of the APEC Food Safety Risk Communication Framework* [▶](#)), which assesses the adequacy of the existing communication strategy and practices and identifies areas for further improvement (see *Guideline on Monitoring and Review of Competent Authority's Food Safety Risk Communication System* [▶](#)). While formal research studies are often expensive there are cost-effective ways to answer the typical questions that will inform a strategic FSRC plan. Cost-effective methods for research include monitoring and listening to food safety risk conversations on social

media, analysing publicly available studies or accessing information already gathered by other parts of the company or organisation.

Research helps to identify potential problem areas that require communication campaigns to improve food safety.

This guideline presents a hypothetical example in which an industry email survey to 100 food bank operators and 700 food recipients found that only 30% of food bank recipients knew to refrigerate the supplied shelf stable milk products after opening. A food bank operator in this case is a place where stocks of food items are stored and distributed to people in need. The survey found that only 5 food bank operators provided food recipients with storage and use information about shelf stable milk products. The research also showed that most food recipients were concerned about the safety of shelf stable milk, and 50% of mothers of young children were especially concerned about its nutritional value. In this case research revealed food safety concerns as well as non-food safety concerns, that is, nutritional value. The industry organisation must decide on and prioritise how many concerns can be effectively addressed at the same time and then communicate with openness, flexibility and transparency.



Analysis (goals, audience-specific objectives and strategies)

Once a problem area has been clearly identified, analysis is required and communication goals need to be established. Goals are long-term, broad statements of desired achievement or statements of future 'being.' Goals may include a conceptual understanding of how an organisation is uniquely distinguished in the minds of target audiences. In the above hypothetical example, goals could include continuing to be a credible source of information on the safety of the organisation's products and increasing

demand for shelf stable milk distribution to food banks. Next, the organisation should select the specific stakeholder groups it wants to target and set the objectives for each one. See Textbox 1.

As explained by the Public Relations Society of America [↗](#), communication objectives are shorter term than goals. Objectives

- 1 define what opinion, attitude or behaviour you want to achieve from specific stakeholder groups
- 2 specify how much change you want to achieve from the targeted audience, and
- 3 tell by when you want to achieve that change (Textbox 1).

Textbox 1

Objectives should be SMART:

- Specific (both action to be taken and public involved)
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic (or relevant or results-oriented)
- Time-specific

[\(APR Study Guide, page 24\) ↗](#)

Sample objectives under the hypothetical food bank example

1 Outcome-oriented objective (example):

01 increase the number of food banks that distribute storage and use information about shelf stable milk to food recipients (desired increase from 5 to 10 food banks)

02 increase the percentage of food recipients who know shelf stable milk products require refrigeration after opening from 30% to 40%.

The timeframe for both these objectives is 12 months after the launch of the communication plan and the desired changes will be determined by research findings.

2 Output-oriented objective (example):

Place feature stories about shelf stable milk storage and safe use in 10 food bank e-newsletters within 12 months after the launch of the communication plan. Note that output objectives can monitor program execution but cannot measure the effectiveness of the communication message.

Once communication objectives and desired outcomes have been identified, strategies to achieve these objectives need to be identified and developed. Communication strategies need to be audience focused.

Sample strategies under the above hypothetical food bank example

Effective strategies to achieve the desired objectives could include:

01 training food bank operators to provide information to food recipients and answer questions about shelf stable milk

02 enlisting community social workers to help deliver our food safety messages to food bank recipients.



Communication (messages, tactics and activities)



Salient food safety risk messages need to be developed based on research about the intended audience and the desired communication objectives. Credible messages should be communicated in a timely manner (Principle 2 [↗](#)), based on science and evidence (Principle 4 [↗](#)), and audience-oriented (Principle 6 [↗](#)).

Examples of communication messages with the hypothetical example could include:

- 'Shelf stable milk is safe and nutritious, and it does not need to be refrigerated until it is opened.'
- 'Shelf stable milk contains the same essential nutrients as pasteurised milk but costs less and does not need to be kept cold until opened. The difference between fresh and shelf stable milk is the method of processing. Shelf stable milk is made safe by heating the milk to high temperatures to kill bad bacteria. This process is safe and approved by regulatory authorities. This safe, nutritious product is a good way for children and families to benefit from milk's essential nutrients.'



The specific delivery channels and tools used are known as 'tactics.' Tactics can include meetings, publications, community events, news releases, social media posts and live events.

Examples of tactics for this hypothetical example could include:

- food safety training videos posted on an industry YouTube Channel
- shelf-signs that explain how to safely store and consume shelf stable milk
- educational webinars for food bank operators
- web resources, including frequently asked questions, that address at-home handling procedures, nutritional benefits and questions and answers about the safety of shelf stable milk
- emailed communications to social workers and other stakeholders in relevant areas.

It is important to include delivery channels that allow for two-way communications with the audiences (Principle 3 [▶](#)). Details of using social media channels to communicate are provided in the *Guideline on Using Social Media Engagement for Food Safety Risk Communication* [▶](#).

The details that underlie the tactics are known as ‘activities’ and these include quantitative specifics regarding production numbers and creative design. An example for the hypothetical food bank example could include the production requirements of 1,000, 20 cm square, four-colour shelf-signs; two videos and six video conference webinars. Activity specifications should also include parameters such as timelines, responsibilities and any other factors of influence, such as expected attendance for live video conferences.



Evaluation

It is a best practice to monitor and measure the effectiveness of a communication strategy against the stated objectives. Details on the processes involved in the monitoring and review can be found in the *Guideline on Monitoring and Review of Competent Authority’s Food Safety Risk Communication System* [▶](#). Industry can conduct research to evaluate whether a communication campaign met the stated objectives. For example, in the hypothetical case described earlier, the same survey that was conducted before the communication campaign can be carried out again to measure improvement against the stated objectives. Evaluation is part of the iterative process that ensures continuous improvement of food safety risk communication (Principle 8 [▶](#)).

Table 1 illustrates the strategic communication planning steps.

Table 1: Example strategic communication planning steps

Strategic Communication Plan Format

Research findings:

Only 30% of food recipients know shelf stable milk requires refrigeration after opening. Only 5 of 100 food bank operators provide food recipients with storage and use information about shelf stable milk products. While most food recipients were concerned about the safety of shelf stable milk, 50% of mothers of young children were concerned about its nutritional value. (Note: Although 'nutrition value' does not pertain directly to food safety, messages may address multiple concerns identified in the research)

Problem to solve in this example: Educate food recipients that shelf stable milk products must be refrigerated after opening and that they are nutritious and safe when handled and consumed as advised. (Note: the research revealed that mothers of young children have a misperception about the nutrition of shelf stable milk, so relevant messages will be included in the general campaign that addresses all food recipients at food banks)

Goal(s): to increase distribution of shelf stable milk to food recipients via food banks

Objectives	Communication Strategies	Messages	Tactics/Tools	Activities		Evaluation Results against Objectives
				Assigned Staff	Other details	
<p>Food Recipients at Food Bank</p> <p>1 Over the next 12 months, increase the percentage of food recipients who know shelf stable milk products require refrigeration after opening from 30% to 40%.</p>	<p>1 Enlist community social workers in the cities in which shelf stable milk is distributed to food banks to help deliver food safety messages to food recipients.</p> <p>2 Collaborate with third-party experts (competent authorities and academics)</p>	<p>1 Shelf stable milk contains the same essential nutrients as pasteurised milk products.</p> <p>2 Shelf stable milk is ultra-pasteurised at high temperatures; this process is safe and approved by regulatory authorities.</p> <p>3 This safe, nutritious product is a good way for children and families to benefit from milk's essential nutrients.</p>	<p>1 Shelf-signs at food banks</p> <p>2 Video conferencing webinars for community social workers to share webpage and FAQs</p> <p>3 Email flyers to social workers</p> <p>4 Use messaging from competent authorities about the safety of shelf stable milk to build credibility.</p>	<p>'John'</p> <p>'Julie'</p> <p>'Joanne'</p> <p>'Simon'</p>	<p>1,000 copies of 20 cm square 4-colour shelf cards</p> <p>One video conference webinar every other month, first one in March</p> <p>Webpage and FAQs</p> <p>PDF flyers emailed to 250 social workers (obtain email address from xxx)</p>	<p>____% of food bank recipients who know to refrigerate shelf stable milk products after opening them.</p> <p>____ number of food banks provide food recipients with use and storage information about shelf stable milk products.</p>

● Adapting the strategic communication planning process to crisis food safety risk communications

Food safety risk communication during a crisis is specifically covered by the *Guideline on Food Safety Risk Communication during a Food Safety Incident, Emergency or Crisis* [↗](#), which is directed at competent authorities of the APEC region. Although many of the concepts discussed in that Guideline can be applied to industry, there are several unique challenges that can have a profound impact on industry food safety communications. These challenges have to do with credibility, capacity and culpability/liability. This section discusses these challenges and ways industry can work to overcome them.



Credibility: Credibility is a component of trust, which is vital to key stakeholder relationships. Research has shown that food companies find the most success when there is a high level of trust between them and their stakeholders. Therefore, it is important that consumers and competent authorities view industry as a credible source of FSRC. However, this can be challenging if these stakeholder groups view industry (either an individual company or an industry as a whole) as being more interested in making a profit than producing safe food.

Liao C, et al. [↗](#) (2020) offered recalling food companies multiple strategies to repair trust with consumers. One is to share information on facts about and solutions to the crisis. Another strategy is to share scientific evidence with consumers in a transparent manner that is not regarded as self-serving. Involving the competent authority or a third party to release the scientific evidence can be used to overcome this obstacle.

Industry's collaborative relationship with competent authorities influences its credibility. Industry's trust in competent authorities can be eroded by conflict with, and distrust in, regulators. On the other hand, a competent authority's trust in industry can be damaged when there is a lack of compliance or a reluctance of industry to work with regulators. Industry and competent authorities can facilitate credibility and trust in one another by sharing information, engaging mutually in food safety education, interacting face to face and communicating with one another frequently (Meyer SB, et al [↗](#). 2017).



Capacity: It is important that personnel involved in risk communications and strategic communication planning are competent and experienced in handling difficult situations, especially when dealing with media and regulatory authorities during emergencies and crises. Capacity building of industry's food safety communication is important to ensure readiness of spokespersons to address any potential issues related to food safety risks identified. Risk assessment findings should be communicated clearly, consistently and comprehensively. This may be challenging for food businesses with little to no capacity (staff, time, experience and financial resources) for FSRC. For example, small to medium-sized businesses that have only one or two staff who oversee primarily marketing communications may not have enough staff to respond quickly to a crisis. Even in large companies, the staff resources and expertise in FSRC can be limited as marketing communication is primarily directed towards business activities. Industry organisations that rely on limited membership dues can also lack the capacity to engage in FSRC.



Culpability and liability: Company culpability and personal liability can result in company resources being invested in legal strategies at the expense of communication strategies. Consumers expect that the food they purchase is safe, but there is no such thing as zero risk in food production, transport and distribution processes. Since food companies control the food production process, the public could perceive the food company as the culprit during a food safety incident, emergency or crisis. In some cases, company owners and managers may also face personal liability for an incident.



Food safety crisis communication plans are designed to help minimise, or even overcome, challenges pertaining to credibility, capacity and culpability/liability issues and the burden they may cause to the food businesses. The risk is minimised by establishing communication channels with authorities, assessing resources and facilitating quick and effective responses. An effective crisis communication plan is

based on stakeholder relationships that are established in everyday circumstances and uses established communication channels, assessment of resources and facilitation of quick and effective responses.



When an emergency or crisis occurs, industry should be prepared to work with competent authorities and other stakeholders (for example, media, subject matter experts, social media influencers and customers) to communicate food safety risk information to consumers and protect public health. The closer that industry works with competent authorities and other credible stakeholders, the more credible it will appear to the

public. Establishing communication channels with competent authorities and ensuring messages are consistent with those of the competent authorities are critical factors to achieving effective food safety communications by food industries. It is desirable to include local regulators' contact information in the crisis communication plan, and, if the opportunity arises, engage with them in advance of a crisis.

Australia and New Zealand's food standards competent authority, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) administers the Retailers and Manufacturers Liaison Committee (RMLC) which provides an opportunity for ongoing dialogue between FSANZ and industry to improve information sharing on issues of common interest. This type of forum can be used to review, assess, and, if necessary, revise industry protocols used in the event of a food safety emergency. Notably, the FSANZ RMLC is run by the agency's Communication and Stakeholder Engagement Section, thereby sending a clear message to the industry that communication, not regulatory enforcement, is the primary focus of this committee.

A crisis communication plan should make use of available resources and skills, as well as identify and address capacity gaps. It is necessary to compare available resources to those required to respond effectively in a crisis. It is also necessary to determine and prioritise where and how to build capacity and identify outside resources that can assist when necessary. By identifying resource gaps in advance and determining how to fill them, the food business operator or industry organisation will be better prepared to handle an incident, emergency or crisis. They will also be better prepared to effectively collaborate with competent authorities and engage with media and other stakeholders. Capacity building should also include practice of crisis scenario responses (food safety

emergency simulation exercises) and training. In the situation that risk perception by a target audience differs from the actual public health impact of a particular hazard, communicators should also be trained on how to address the underlying reasons for the risk perception gap.



Finally, crisis planning helps industry respond in a timely manner and also make informed decisions, potentially reducing the legal and economic impact of food safety incidents and crises. For example, food recalls are necessary to protect public health, but recalls represent significant financial impact to food industry. In a 2020 study, Gomez and Marks [showed](#) that the median loss in corporate stock value of publicly held companies in the United States due to recalls of 22 low-moisture foods between 2007 and 2016 was US\$243M.

Crisis planning benefits companies and industry organisations, and there are many resources available (some listed at the end of this Guideline) to help develop a crisis communication plan.

• Conclusion

This guideline outlines the steps involved in developing a strategic food safety risk communication plan and how to adapt the plan to crisis food safety communication. These steps comprise research, analysis, communication and evaluation. Other guidelines and the Industry Annex developed under the Framework, as referenced in this document, can also benefit in developing and evaluating industry FSRC. A key recommendation of this guideline is to encourage industry to work collaboratively with competent authorities in advancing FSRC for both everyday and crisis situations. This is best facilitated through regular communication with competent authorities.

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• Further Reading

Crisis templates, recall plans and tools



Food Standards Australia and New Zealand, Food Industry Recall Protocol, May 2014. Section 5.



International Food Information Council, Food Safety, A Communicator's Guide to Improving Understanding.



Ready.gov, Crisis Communications Plan.



U.S. Food & Drug Administration, Hazard Analysis and Risk-Based Preventive Controls for Human Food: Draft Guidance for Industry, Chapter 14, Recall Plan.



World Health Organization and Food & Agriculture Organization, Risk Communication Applied to Food Safety Handbook, pages 87-92,



Food crisis communication industry workshops, training and information



Food Protection and Defense Institute.



Joint Institute for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (JIFSAN), *Center for Food Safety and Security Systems*.



United Fresh Produce Association's Recall Ready Program.

