



BRIEF

FDA takes too long to announce recalls, federal investigator says

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Dive Brief:

- Federal investigators have found the Food and Drug Administration is moving too slowly when dealing with contaminated food products, [according to The New York Times](#).
- The inspector general at the Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees the FDA, studied 30 of the nearly 1,600 food recalls from 2012 to 2015. On average, food companies took 57 days to recall an item after the FDA was made aware the product could make consumers sick. One recall didn't begin for 303 days, investigators found.

- The Food Safety Modernization Act, which was signed into law by President Obama in 2011, increased the FDA's power over food manufacturers, allowing the agency to issue a mandatory recall when a company doesn't voluntarily pull unsafe products. The FDA has used this new authority twice so far.

Dive Insight:

The Food and Drug Administration is putting consumers at risk by not acting quickly enough, according to federal investigators. Each year, roughly 48 million U.S. consumers get sick from food-borne diseases, and 3,000 die from them, according to the agency.

Of the 30 cases that federal investigators examined, a couple stand out due to the severe risk they posed to the public. Recalls of cheese products produced by Oasis Brands exposed consumers to listeria. Eighty-one days passed between when the FDA learned about the contamination and when the products were recalled. The FDA also was aware of salmonella-contaminated nut butters sold by nSpired Natural Foods for more than five months before the company issued a recall.

FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb told the New York Times the agency had taken to heart the inspector general's earlier warning and has already started to address recall enforcement problems that have persisted for years. One initiative is the creation of a team of senior staffers who meet weekly to review complicated or unusual recall cases.

Overall, federal investigators reviewing recall cases have discovered inconsistency at best and negligence at worst in the way the FDA responds to contamination reports. Still, this doesn't mean that food manufacturers are running wild. Many Big Food companies and grocers are ramping up their responses to food recalls in order to bolster both public health and their image.

Warehouse giant Costco notifies its 60 million members within 24-hour hours if they've bought a recalled item, and follows that up with a letter. As a result, consumers typically return 90% of recalled items. If a serious health risk is attached to the recall, that number goes up even more.


Wegmans, among other companies, is embracing technology as a means to reach consumers quickly when a contaminated product has been detected. The

East Coast chain posts recall information on its website, inside stores and on social media to reach as many customers as possible.


Increased vigilance on the part of food companies, grocers and consumers is a step in the right direction to make the food supply safer. However, the FDA still needs to do its job, and according to federal investigators, it needs to do it better. If the agency continues to stall after learning of contaminated food products, it risks both public health and its own reputation.

Recommended Reading:

 FDA

[Statement from FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb, M.D. on efforts to support more efficient and effective food recalls](#) 

 USA Today

[Inspector general report: FDA food recalls dangerously slow, procedures deeply flawed](#) 

 NPR

[FDA Takes Too Long To Recall Tainted Food, Federal Investigators Say](#) 

 The New York Times

[F.D.A. Leaves Tainted Foods on Shelves Too Long, Report Finds](#) 

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