

Alert 14-11: Food Safety and the Global Food Safety Initiative

Packaging is an integral part of delivering food safely to consumers. Historically considered a food additive, packaging once was required to comply with appropriately referenced sections of U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations. Recently, several key issues have developed that affect the manufacture of packaging designed to hold food products. With an increased focus on food safety, it has been recognized that the design and manufacture of packaging is a critical component of the food supply chain.

In response to worldwide concerns for food safety and the need for global standards, the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) was founded in 2000. This group's mission is to address the continuous improvement of food safety systems. Recently, GFSI expanded to encompass all key components of the supply chain, including packaging.

GFSI is not in itself a standard but rather a benchmarking organization that has recognized several food safety management schemes. Certification to a GFSI Recognized Scheme is achieved by a third party audit to a recognized scheme. Most food packaging manufacturers use the foundation of current Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) and prerequisite programs to achieve certification. The road map to achieve GFSI Recognized certification is Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP). HACCP, as defined by the FDA, is a management system in which food safety is addressed through the analysis and control of biological, physical and chemical hazards from raw material production, procurement and handling, to manufacturing, distribution and consumption of the finished product. This includes the manufacture of food packaging and components.

In January 2011, the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) was signed into law in response to several severe instances of food poisoning or adulteration in the food supply chain. According to recent estimates from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 48 million people get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized and 300 die each year from foodborne illnesses. With the passage of FSMA, regulators are better equipped to prevent, rather than respond to, food contamination. Experts predict this act will lead to a huge change in food safety in the United States.

As North American retailers and food processors increasingly require certification from their suppliers regarding food safety management, GFSI certification may be required. Once the HACCP, prerequisite programs and management systems are in place, the packaging or component manufacturer is ready for a third-party audit to one of the GFSI benchmarked schemes. This will allow the packaging manufacturer to meet the requirements of their customers for compliance with regard to food safety. Obtaining this certification allows the manufacturer to assure its customers that they meet the key requirements for packaging food safety.

Links for More Information

- GFSI-benchmarked standards: <http://www.mygfsi.com/contact-us/scheme-owners.html>
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimates: <http://www.cdc.gov/foodborneburden/estimates-overview.html>

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