



FSSAI directs 200 food cos to submit fresh food recall plans by May 26

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FSSAI has asked 200 top food companies to submit their fresh food recall plans within the next two months (i.e. by May 26, 2018). But a month prior to that (i.e. by April 26), they will be required to submit the details of their recall management team.

The country's apex food regulator, which has stated that these documents will help them get their licenses renewed, will take into account their adherence to the submission of their recall plans at the time of renewal of the FSSAI licenses.

According to a senior FSSAI functionary, the country's apex food regulator will insist on the plan at the time of license renewal.

The companies include ITC Ltd (Kolkata), Hindustan Unilever Ltd, Adani Wilmar Limited, Glaxo Smithkline Consumer Healthcare Ltd, Cargill India Pvt Ltd, Pepsico India Holdings Limited, Britannia Industries Ltd, Patanjali Ayurved Ltd, Cavinkare Pvt Ltd, Dabur India Ltd, Coca-Cola India Private Limited, Nestle India Ltd, Tata Global Beverage Ltd, Marico Ltd, Mother Dairy Fruit and Vegetable Pvt Ltd, Perfetti Van Melle India Pvt Ltd, Mondelez India Foods Limited, Gujarat Co-op Milk Marketing Federation Ltd, Tata Chemicals Ltd, Mahashian Di Hatti Ltd, Bisleri International Pvt Ltd, Dr Oetker India Pvt Ltd, Godrej Industries Ltd (vegetable oils division), Hershey India Private Limited, Kellogg India Ltd, Tata Coffee Limited, LT Foods, Parag Milk Foods Ltd, Gits Food Products Pvt Ltd, Hector Beverages Pvt Ltd, Veeba Food Services Pvt Ltd, Havmor Ice Cream Ltd, McCain Foods India Pvt Ltd, Ruchi Soya Industries Ltd, Balaji Wafers Pvt Ltd and Yakult Danone India Pvt Ltd, amongst others.

The senior official with the regulator stated that the reason for selection of these 200 companies was that they covered around 70 per cent of the market, and subsequently, the cover would spread across the food sector.

“Based on the data available with us, and with 70 per cent coverage, the companies were identified and given the direction. These, being big companies and with good outreach, will be able to implement the plan,” the official said, adding that the recall plan can be based on the model plan released by the apex regulator or independent, based

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on the companies' specific requirements, but will be needed for the renewal of their licenses.

A meeting was held at FSSAI's headquarters earlier this year. The apex regulator's chief executive officer Pawan Kumar Agarwal said that to ensure safe food and to create confidence amongst consumers at large, the effective implementation of food recall was needed.

"Even though our distribution system is highly fragmented, we should be in a position to track and recall each and every packet of food using updated technology. Further, recall information is needed to percolate up to the level of retailer and then to consumer," he said.

At the meeting, it was decided that there will be a National Recall Portal Module, which will facilitate the FBOs to upload product details and regulator to view the same through the regulator interface for further action.

This would act as a communicating tool for the both food business operators (FBOs) and the regulators. The details of the communication, thereafter, will be communicated to the consumers by means of an app promoted by the department of consumer affairs.

Further, it was also decided that for an effective recall plan, the GTIN barcode and batch number will be made mandatory for Centrally-licensed FBOs, and the regulation department has been asked to make the necessary amendment for the same in the regulations.

A review meeting on the compliance will be held in three months to assess the progress and impact, while the companies have been asked to appoint a single-point reference to sensitise their respective departments about the plan.

Commenting on the directive, Sahil Gilani, director, sales and marketing, Gits Food, stated, "A recall plan is very critical in the food safety ecosystem. In the 55 years since Gits' inception, our stringent quality standards have kept us safe from product recalls."

"However, this does not mean that it may never happen, and hence, we are already equipped with a recall plan. We will be submitting this plan to FSSAI as per their request," he added.

Gilani stated that implementing a recall plan was extremely complex in the Indian retail environment. "We did several mock recalls before being able to firm up an effective recall plan that meets FSSAI's requirements," he added.

The sheer width of the Indian retail environment, with its several external stakeholders, such as kirana stores, modern trade stores, distributors, super stockists, wholesalers, clearing and forwarding (C&F agents), to name a few, make the tracking and recall process extremely complex.

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On the selection of 200 companies, Gilani said, “I think FSSAI has selected 200 players in the organised segment for now, as these companies have better systems in place to execute recall plans.”

“I don't think FSSAI is going to leave out the unorganised players from the ambit of recall plans. Instead, they might share the learnings from the 200 organised companies to create benchmarks and systems that will enable the rest to easily comply,” he added.

He stated that knowledge sharing, in case of such critical initiatives, will be helpful for the entire industry.