

FSSAI sets up framework for Food Safety Emergency Response system

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The apex food authority has made a framework of national Food Safety Emergency Response –FSER system, which outlines the multi sectorial coordination, their roles, responsibilities and manages the actions during a food safety emergency situation.

An official with the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) told that under the FSS Act, the food authority has the mandate to search, collect, collate, analyse and summarise relevant scientific and technical data related to identification of emerging risk and introduce a rapid alert system.

The framework of the FSER system will help the authority to focus on prevention and preparedness in response to a food borne emergency situation.

According to the FSSAI, the Food Safety Emergency Response (FSER) Plans are a framework developed that aims at managing a potential or confirmed risk to public health arising from food through a timely and coordinated response so as to minimize any adverse impact on health and disruption to trade. Such planning also enables food safety authorities to focus on prevention and preparedness, rather than only on reaction to individual events, and therefore has greater long-term sustainability.

Under the Framework, the FSSAI has defined food safety incidents, food safety emergencies, food safety emergency response, and foodborne outbreak.

“This plan addresses policies and procedures that will minimise the impact of a food safety emergency situation related to the state’s food supply. In addition, the plan addresses recovery following an incident. The plan stresses local, state and central interagency cooperation, as well as cooperation with industry. This cooperation will be essential when responding and recovering rapidly to any attack or threat to the state’s food supply,” said an official with the FSSAI.

The structure of the FSER includes a National Emergency Contact Point (NECP) for coordination of national food safety emergency response and FSSAI will function as National Emergency Contact Point (NECP), National Focal Points (NFPs): These are other national authorities who have stake in food safety, and Food safety risk assessment Committee (FSRAC): which is a risk assessment body and shall be responsible for providing technical and scientific support both in normal or emergency situations including identifying the severity of the risk.

Besides, the FSSAI has constituted a Food Safety Coordination Committee –FSCC for managing food safety emergency situations in the country.

The responsibilities of the committee would be to take decisions for controlling and management of the food safety emergency situation, issue directions to the related agencies in executing the plans, evaluate the results of the emergency response and look after the preparedness.

The FSCC will have 16 members including CEO- FSSAI as chairperson, FSSAI's ED – Compliance Strategy/Training, Advisor (Scientific and Standards), Joint Secretaries of Ministry of Health, Agriculture, Commerce (agri division), Cattle Dairy Development (ministry of Animal Husbandry), Consumer Affairs, Fisheries, Nutrition (Ministry of Women and Child Development), livestock health (Ministry of Animal Husbandry), Directors of – Export Inspection Council of India, and National Centre for Disease Control, Representative of ICMR, Director Imports FSSAI, and Head Food Safety Emergency Cell.