

# Import Safety Action Plan: Increasing Protection Of American Consumers

*Interagency Working Group On Import Safety Presents Action Plan To President Bush*

Today, the Interagency Working Group on Import Safety presented to President Bush its Action Plan, which contains short- and long-term recommendations for continuing to improve the safety of imports entering the United States. The Action Plan contains 14 broad recommendations and 50 action steps that provide a road map for better protecting American consumers and enhancing the safety of the increasing volume of imports entering the United States. The Action Plan is the product of extensive coordination among Federal agencies, months of hands-on information-gathering, and feedback and suggestions from the private sector.

- **The Action Plan proposes a strategy focused on a risk-based prevention with verification model that allocates import safety resources based on risk.** The Action Plan proposes steps to replace the current "snapshot" approach to import safety, in which inspections are made at the border, with a cost-effective, prevention-focused model that maximizes the impact of public and private safeguards by identifying and targeting critical points in the import life cycle where risk is greatest and focusing attention and resources on these areas.
- **The sheer magnitude of the import-export enterprise makes clear that our Nation cannot inspect its way to safety.** Last year, the United States imported nearly \$2 trillion of goods through more than 825,000 importers. Experts project that the value of imports will triple by 2015. Physically inspecting every item would bring international trade to a standstill and divert limited resources from those items posing the greatest threat.
- **The Action Plan presented today reflects the Administration's commitment to continually strengthen and improve the import safety system.** Americans benefit from strong and effective food and product safety standards. Implementing the Action Plan's recommendations will result in a system that builds safety every step of the way into the products on which American consumers depend.

## Highlights Of The Action Plan's Recommendations

1. **Creating A Stronger Certification Process.** Certification can be a powerful tool to foster compliance with U.S. safety standards while facilitating trade. For example, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) should have the authority to require that producers of certain high-risk foods in a particular country, under an agreement with that country, certify that their products meet FDA standards in order to export to the United States. This would help "shrink the haystack" and better target resources on the greatest threats. In addition, voluntary certification should be encouraged for foreign manufacturers of other products. Products certified as meeting U.S. safety standards could receive expedited entry.
2. **Encouraging Good Importer Practices.** The Action Plan recommends the adoption of best practices to improve import safety and benefit consumers by providing incentives to importers to maintain the highest safety practices for products that carry greater risks.
3. **Increasing Transparency.** The names of certified producers and importers of record that import products only from certified producers could be made public, so that consumers and distributors can make more informed decisions about product safety.
4. **Exchanging Import Data.** The importing community, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and other Federal agencies will exchange real-time product and compliance data on each import transaction to better inform decisions to clear or reject import shipments. The Action Plan also recommends that strategic information sharing agreements be concluded with key foreign governments, in order to facilitate the exchange of import and recall data.
5. **Increasing U.S. Presence Overseas.** Product safety should be a guiding principle of U.S. cooperative agreements with foreign governments. It will also be important to increase training for foreign inspection agencies to build the capacity of foreign governments to ensure the safety of products exported to the United States. In addition, increasing our physical

presence abroad and working with foreign governments and manufacturers will help ensure compliance with U.S. safety standards.

6. **Enhancing Standards.** Congress should give import safety and inspection agencies the ability to strengthen their standards, where needed. These new authorities should take into consideration industry best practices in order to leverage the knowledge and experience of those who best understand how the products are made.
7. **Strengthening Penalties.** To hold both foreign and domestic entities accountable and discourage the sale of unsafe products, the Federal government will take steps to strengthen penalties against entities that violate U.S. laws, providing a significant incentive to comply with U.S. requirements.

### Even As Agencies Implement The Action Plan's Recommendations, Other Import Safety Initiatives Are Already Underway

On September 10, 2007, the Working Group presented President Bush with a Strategic Framework to increase import safety that called for several immediate steps. One of these steps was a directive to Federal agencies to accelerate their participation in an automated "single window" system for reporting imports electronically. This will enable better coordination and efficiency to permit information exchange among government agencies and between the government and the importing community in real time.

In conjunction with the Action Plan, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has developed a comprehensive three-part Food Protection Plan. This plan uses science and a risk-based approach of prevention, intervention, and response to ensure the safety of domestic, as well as imported, foods consumed by Americans. It will support the FDA's ongoing collaboration with other Federal agencies that have a role in the safety of our Nation's food supply, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service.

- **Both the Import Safety Action Plan and Food Protection Plan recommend that FDA be authorized to pursue the mandatory recall of food products.** This authority would be exercised by FDA only where the adulterated or contaminated food poses a threat of serious health consequences or death and where a firm either refuses to undertake a voluntary recall or is not acting with sufficient speed. Granting FDA this authority would enable it to achieve the same level of recall compliance as USDA, which has the authority to withdraw its inspectors from a food processing facility when faced with similar situations.

### Background On The Interagency Working Group On Import Safety

President Bush established the Import Safety Working Group on July 18, 2007, to conduct a comprehensive review of the U.S. import system and identify ways to further increase the safety of imports entering the United States. The Working Group is chaired by HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt and is comprised of 12 Federal departments and agencies. Working Group members visited more than two dozen cities across the country, covering ports, railroads, airports, freight hubs, border crossings, wholesalers, retailers, fruit stands, and meat and seafood processing facilities. The Group presented its initial findings to the President on September 10, 2007.

More information on the Import Safety Working Group and the full text of the Import Safety Action Plan may be accessed at: [www.importsafety.gov](http://www.importsafety.gov).