



AMERICAN DIETETIC ASSOCIATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY HOD BACKGROUNDER: Safety of the Food and Water Supply

The House of Delegates Leadership Team (HLT) reviewed the Mega Issues List and the 2002 Environmental Scanning Report. With recent events and announcements from the government the HLT felt that the profession of dietetics and the American Dietetic Association should further examine the issue of threats to our food and water supply. To ensure a manageable discussion, the HLT decided to focus on disasters, both intentional (bioterrorism) and unintentional (natural disaster). Other avenues of threat to the food supply, including sustainability and food ingredients, will be addressed in future dialogues.

It is recognized that regardless of the cause of the disasters, dietetics professionals have the potential to play a key role in preparedness and relief efforts. One example from recent Asian tsunami relief efforts is a case where survivors of the tsunami were given rice and water. Unfortunately the two items were delivered on separate days causing distrust and making it impossible to consume the rice until the water was available for cooking. One could conclude that if a dietetics professional had been involved in the effort, this situation may not have occurred.

MEGA ISSUE QUESTIONS: What is the role of dietetics professionals in addressing the safety of the food and water supply in the context of unintended disasters or bioterrorism? How can dietetics professionals serve as a resource to ensure a safe and adequate food and water safety?

EXPECTED OUTCOME: A series of recommendations will be developed on how dietetics professionals can actively support the public's access to a safe and adequate food and water supply during a crisis (either unintended or manmade).

One of our nation's premier concerns since September 11, 2001, is biosecurity. This concern not only includes defending the nation from direct attacks to people, but also from attacks that attempt to disrupt America's ability to feed itself and the world. A single plant or animal disease outbreak, not brought quickly into check, could drastically affect our ability to keep our animals and plants healthy. Furthermore, an outbreak even on a very limited scale could undermine consumer confidence in the food supply if it is mishandled.

The episodic nature of fears is clear from the aftermath of the September 11th attacks. Periodically, and based on real incidents or threats, people have expressed concern about threats to water supplies, food, animal health oversight, etc. The recent tsunami effecting South Asia and claiming more than 160,000 lives has also made us look at the preparedness of the US for natural or unintended disasters.

The Department of Homeland Security (www.dhs.gov), Food and Drug Administration (www.fda.gov), Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov), and United States Department of Agriculture (www.usda.gov) Web sites all have information related to terrorism and other public health emergencies that dietetics professionals should be monitoring. Generally, dietetics professionals are most concerned about the food safety issues but understanding is needed about the events that could result in large numbers of critically ill victims requiring clinical care (i.e. patients on ventilators) or in hospitals being subjected to quarantine procedures. These kinds of scenarios require clinical professionals as well as food service personnel due to a surge in both acuity and capacity.

Though the likelihood of a biological or chemical attack on the US food supply is uncertain, significant scientific evidence documents the risk to public from food that has been inadvertently contaminated. Notwithstanding the uncertainties and given the broad range of agents that may contaminate the food supply, the Food and Drug Administration concluded that there is a high likelihood, over the course of a year, that a significant number of people will be affected by an incident of unintentional food contamination resulting from a disaster (intended or unintended) that leads to serious foodborne illness.

FDA believes the risk of a terror attack on the US food supply is low because of steps by the government to tighten its food security web. However, outgoing Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson has stated he is "still not comfortable" about the safety of the US food and water supply, despite an increase in federal inspections of food imports.

In the event of a terrorist attack, natural disaster or other large-scale emergency, the Department of Homeland Security will assume primary responsibility for ensuring that emergency response

professionals are prepared for any situation. This will entail providing a coordinated, comprehensive federal response to any large-scale crisis and mounting a swift and effective recovery effort. Agencies and programs coordinated by DHS include: Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program, National Disaster Medical System (NDMS), Strategic National Stockpile, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and Ready.gov Web site.

FEMA provides a list of disasters in the United State in 2004 (www.fema.gov/news/disasters.fema?year=2004). Disasters such as floods can affect the safety of the water supply. Storms in the Midwest cause extensive power outages, which has ramifications on the storage and safety of perishable foods, not to mention the effect on food preparation. This past fall, the effects of hurricanes influenced many southern dietetics professionals.

The topic of disasters (intended and unintended) has been discussed in several *Journal* and DPG newsletters. These articles range from providing practitioners with information for clients about food safety during a disaster to sharing the experience of dietetics professionals after 9/11. One article emphasized the unique skills that dietetics professionals have to ensure a safe food and water supply. Another article provided key Web sites that provide more information on disaster preparedness and response.

ADA's commitment to helping people enjoy healthy lives brings the Association into the forefront of five critical health areas facing all Americans. One critical area is "safe and nutritious food supply" which should also be a priority in times of disasters. It is also the position of the American Dietetic Association that the public has the right to a safe food and water supply. The Association supports collaboration among dietetics professionals, academics, representatives of the agricultural and food industries, and appropriate government agencies to ensure the safety of the food and water supply by providing education to the public and industry, promoting technologic innovation and applications, and supporting further research. Dietetic practice groups that are aligned with prevention and preparedness for disasters are Hunger and Environmental Nutrition, Management in Food and Nutrition Systems, and Public Health/Community Nutrition.

The public will not experience a safe food supply unless dietetics professionals are knowledgeable about plans to provide safe food and water following a disaster; and have a plan to be personally involved in providing food after a disaster. Dietetics professionals have the potential to play a key role in times of disasters by being aware of their environment, knowing their community and state resources, being prepared in the event of a disaster and participating in the coordination and delivery of relief to victims affected by disasters.

The Standards of Professional Practice and ADA/CDR Code of Ethics both demonstrate that dietetics professionals are committed to providing services and managing resources to ensure a safe and secure food and water supply. Dietetics professionals have personal accountability to be aware of threats to the food and water supply and attain an appropriate level of competency in this area.

Suggested Web sites to determine local and state disaster preparedness and response activities:

- FEMA regional offices: www.fema.gov/regions/
- Find your local American Red Cross Chapter: www.redcross.org/where/chapts.html
- Community Emergency Response Team (CERT): www.training.fema.gov/emiweb/CERT/dir.asp
- Department of Homeland Security Volunteering: www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?theme=41
- Department of Homeland Security Emergency Disaster Planning & Prevention by State: www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?theme=14&content=3283.

Pre-Meeting Activities for Delegates:

Delegates will solicit responses to the following questions and will post the feedback on the HOD Col by Friday, April 15.

1. What events or experience have occurred in the last 5 years in your community that impacted the safety of the food and water supply?
2. What roles did dietetics professionals play in responding to the described event or experience?
3. What other roles might the dietetics professional play in an emergency situation?
4. What current resources exist for addressing potential emergency situations that will impact the food and water safety at the local and state level?

The full HOD Backgrounder: Safety of the Food and Water Supply and References is available at www.eatright.org/Member/85_21630.cfm.