

Egg scare shows flaws in food alert system: watchdog

August 24 2017

Recalls of unsafe food products often reach consumers too late or not at all, the campaign group Foodwatch said Thursday, calling for tighter oversight after a Europe-wide scare erupted over insecticide-tainted eggs.

"The flawed communication about the fipronil-contaminated [eggs](#) is not an isolated case," the German branch of Foodwatch said in a report.

"Consumers routinely don't know about important [food](#) warnings. Often the companies and authorities decide on recalls too late, or sometimes not at all."

Foodwatch said the failings in the food alert system "were once again on display with the lack of information from authorities in the recent scandal over the fipronil-contaminated eggs."

Millions of eggs have been pulled from [supermarket shelves](#) and destroyed. The scare has spread to 18 European countries and even reached Hong Kong.

Officials in Germany, as in several other countries, have come under fire for not going public early enough with their concerns.

In its report, "Calling for a recall", Foodwatch said a study of 92 recalls in Germany over a year showed that just 53 percent were flagged on time on a government-run [food safety](#) website (lebensmittelwarnung.de).

In one case, a warning over possible listeria-tainted mushrooms only went online three days after the authorities were notified. It had come in over the New Year's break, when no-one was working, Foodwatch said.

Foodwatch said current food safety regulations were too vague and left "too much room for interpretation" as to when a recall is needed.

It urged the government to take a more active role, as producers had a clear "conflict of interest" when it came to taking unsafe products off the market.

It also said more efforts had to be made to tell consumers about recalls, using all possible means including social media, press releases and signs in supermarkets.

"Food producers almost never use all the communication tools available to warn about [unsafe products](#)," Foodwatch said.

In the case of the eggs scare, Belgium became the first country to officially notify the EU's food safety alert system on July 20, followed by the Netherlands and Germany.

But the news did not go public until August 1.

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Citation: Egg scare shows flaws in food alert system: watchdog (2017, August 24) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-08-egg-flaws-food-watchdog.html>

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