Questions and Answers - Rapid Alert System for dangerous non-food products in 2014

Brussels, 23 March 2015

1. What is the Rapid Alert System for dangerous non-food products?

The European rapid alert system for dangerous non-food products ensures that information about dangerous products withdrawn from the market and/or recalled from consumers anywhere in Europe is quickly circulated between Member States and the European Commission, so that appropriate action can be taken everywhere in the EU. Thirty-one countries (EU together with Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) currently participate in the system.

What type of measures can be taken?

The most common measures are: ban/stop on sales; withdrawal of a dangerous product from the market or its recall from consumers; and import rejection by the customs authorities.

What is covered by this alert system?

The system covers dangerous non-food products intended for consumers (e.g. a toy, a cosmetic, clothing) and for professionals (e.g. a power drill, a machine, a construction product), which pose a serious risk to the health and safety of consumers (risks of injuries, chemical risks, etc.) as well as to various public interests, such as 'environment' (risk for trees, water, air, soil, etc. from dangerous chemicals contained in a product), 'health and safety at the workplace' and 'public security'.

Other categories of non-food products, such as pharmaceuticals and medical devices, are excluded from its scope as they are covered by other specific alert systems.

What are the obligations of national authorities?

National authorities ensure that businesses respect their obligation to place only safe products on the market. Each country designates a national Contact Point, which coordinates the system at national level and submits information to the Commission about dangerous products found on its own market. Notifications submitted are validated by the Commission and rapidly circulated to the participating countries for appropriate action. The results of these follow up activities are reported back through the system.

What are the obligations of producers?

Producers (i.e. manufacturers and importers) are responsible for placing only safe products on the market. Once aware that a product is dangerous, a producer must immediately take measures to prevent further risks to consumers and inform the competent authorities about the safety problem, clearly identifying the product in question, the risks it poses and the information necessary to trace it. This information is then conveyed via the rapid alert system to the Commission and other participating countries if the product poses a serious risk.

2. Analysis of the activities reported in the rapid alert system

What were the most significant developments in 2014?

Statistics show an increase in both the number of notifications and follow-up actions reported in the system: the highest number ever of 2435 notifications, of which 2153 concerned products causing serious risk, were registered in 2014. This constitutes 3 % more notifications than in 2013. The number of registered follow-up actions also attained a record level with 2755 reactions on products posing a risk to health and safety of consumers, of which 2666 were identified as causing a serious risk.

In 2014, particular emphasis has been given to boost the efficiency of the system and to further encourage its use. The Commission launched several initiatives, such as the creation of a user-friendly search function on the public website of the alert system. As a result, the number of visits doubled, reaching 1.7 million.

Since its creation, the rapid alert system has been successfully contributing to the protection of European consumers, with more than 19 000 notifications on dangerous products sent by the
The main achievements in 2014 were:
- Important growth in number of follow-up actions reported (28%)
- Steady increase in the number of notifications (3%)
- More comprehensive and complete information concerning alerts
- More frequent visits to collect information by economic operators and consumers
- Increased level of measures adopted by customs

**Why did the number of notifications for dangerous goods increase in 2014?**

With the only exception of 2011, the number of notifications has increased steadily since its creation in 2003. Over the last four years, the number of notifications has consistently been above 2000 each year.

These figures show the importance Member State authorities and the Commission give to the protection of consumer safety. The increase in the number of notifications implies that consumers can be confident since more dangerous products have been removed from the EU market.

**What is the effect of the increased number of follow up actions in 2014 as compared to 2013?**

Follow-up actions indicate that EU Member States have taken action after a notification was distributed in the system. This mainly implies that the product was searched and found on other national markets and measures were taken accordingly. The total follow-up actions in 2014 were 2 755, which represents a substantial increase with respect to 2013 (2 147). Notifications from all product sectors identified in the system received follow-ups, although motor vehicles represented the largest share of all these reactions (1 714).

The share of the follow-ups was more evenly distributed than for the notifications. Denmark and Greece submitted 8% of the follow up reactions, Sweden and Spain 7% and the Netherlands 6%.

**Which EU countries notified most cases?**

In 2014, the amount of notifications per country was similar to that registered the previous year with some small changes. All participating countries have notified dangerous products.

The following five Member States accounted for half of all notifications on dangerous products in 2014:

- Hungary 12 % (291 notifications)
- Germany 11 % (273 notifications)
- Spain 11 % (272 notifications)
- France 7 % (163 notifications)
- Cyprus 6 % (151 notifications)

The registered share of activities including notifications and follow-up actions actions among countries participating in the Rapid Alert System, remained similar to that reported in 2013, with Spain accounting for 9%, followed by Hungary with 8% and Germany with 7%.

**What are the main products and risks detected through the rapid alert system?**

The product categories most often notified, which accounted for 70% of all notifications were:

1. Toys (650 notifications, 28%)
2. Clothing, textiles and fashion items (530 notifications, 23%)
3. Electrical appliances and equipment (217 notifications, 9%)
4. Motor vehicles (194 notifications, 8%)
5. Childcare articles (81 notifications, 3%)

This distribution also shows a relatively stable pattern of product categories for which notifications have been made. Toys and clothing account for over 50% of the cases.

The high volumes of consumption_supply of these five categories (e.g. electrical appliances include mobile phones, laptops, extension leads, battery chargers) increase the chances of finding dangerous products among them.

The five most frequently notified risk categories were:
- Injuries (707 notifications, 26 %)
- Chemical (674 notifications, 25 %)
- Choking (313 notifications, 12 %)
- Electric shock (295 notifications, 11 %)
- Strangulation (258 notifications, 9 %)

What does it mean when a country makes a lot of notifications – are there more dangerous products on that particular market?

The number of notifications made by a particular Member State cannot be directly linked to the level of safety of the products on its market. Differences in the number of notifications between Member States can be explained by a variety of factors: large market, large import volumes, experienced inspectors, etc. In general, a high number of notifications in some Member States is due to the size of their markets, the number of imported goods, or the number of inspectors.

What measures did the national authorities take in response to the dangerous goods that they found?

The most frequently compulsory measures taken with regard to dangerous consumer products in 2014 were: withdrawal from the market, sales ban, recall from consumers, import rejected by the customs authorities, and corrective actions.

Where did the largest amount of dangerous products come from in 2014?

The majority of dangerous products notified in the system came from outside the EU. China (including Hong Kong) was indicated as a country of origin for 64% (1 501) of notified products, Turkey and the USA each accounted for 3% of the notified cases (66 and 60 respectively).

Dangerous products of European origin accounted for 325 notifications (14%), including 75 products of German origin, 39 products of Italian origin, 31 from the UK and 30 products from France.

The share of notifications on products made in the EU continues to steadily decrease from 27% of the cases in 2003 to 14% in 2014. The share notifications of products from unknown origin in 2014 is at a record low of 7%, showing that notifications submitted are more comprehensive and that traceability efforts are bearing fruit.

3. Cooperation with China

The EU and China are the biggest trade partners in the world; China is the EU's first supplier and its second customer after the USA. The European Commission and the Member States have established a regular cooperation with the Chinese authorities on product safety issues.

Is there an increase in the number of notifications on products of Chinese origin?

No, the share of consumer products of Chinese origin notified via the alert system is stable (64%) and this percentage appears to reflect the general market share of consumer products made in China available on our markets. Nevertheless our cooperation with the Chinese administration and businesses will continue to ensure that corrective measures are taken at the source, so that less unsafe products are shipped to the EU markets.

Does the Commission get feedback on how the Chinese authorities follow up on the information sent to China on products of Chinese origin?

Cooperation with China on exchange of information on dangerous products from Chinese origin is well-established, as the competent Chinese authorities (AQSIQ) submit quarterly reports to the Commission with the conclusions of the follow-up actions undertaken.

The information provided in the reports allows the Commission and Member States to monitor and analyse the follow-up market surveillance activities carried out by the Chinese authorities on their territory, and as a consequence allows them to identify and address any issues in the cooperation system. So far, 30 quarterly reports have been provided to the Commission.

How many notifications has AQSIQ investigated since the establishment of the cooperation?

From 2006 to 2014, AQSIQ has ensured follow-up action on more than 3 000 notifications. On average AQSIQ investigates about one hundred cases per month. On average, 57% of the investigations resulted in preventive or restrictive measures being adopted either by AQSIQ or voluntarily by the Chinese manufacturer/exporter (e.g. export stop or strengthened supervision). This figure remains stable over time. For cases where no measures were taken, the main reason indicated was that no sufficient information was available to trace the Chinese company responsible for manufacturing and/or exporting products to the EU.
For more information:
- Press release
- Factsheet
- Product Safety page
- Weekly reports or specific data
- Search tool for the alert system
- Rapid Alert System national contact points
- Latest facts and figures

General public inquiries:
Europe Direct by phone 00 800 67 89 10 11 or by email