

# HEALTH AND CONSUMER VOICE

## 35 years of protecting human and animal health

This year we celebrate the 35th anniversary of the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF). Europe is more than ever reliant on RASFF to ensure that the food that arrives on Europe's tables meets some of the highest safety standards in the world. Thanks to the work carried out through RASFF, measures to prevent, reduce or eliminate public health risks can be taken.

In 2013, RASFF proved instrumental for food safety authorities to trace back mislabelled beef products that contained horsemeat. Through the cross-border exchange of information, products adulterated with horsemeat were traced to source and swiftly removed from the market. With increasingly sophisticated food frauds affecting European consumers, we undertook to develop a dedicated food fraud IT



Tonio Borg  
EU Commissioner for Health

system inspired by RASFF, to underpin the work of the new EU Food Fraud Network which will be up and running in 2015.

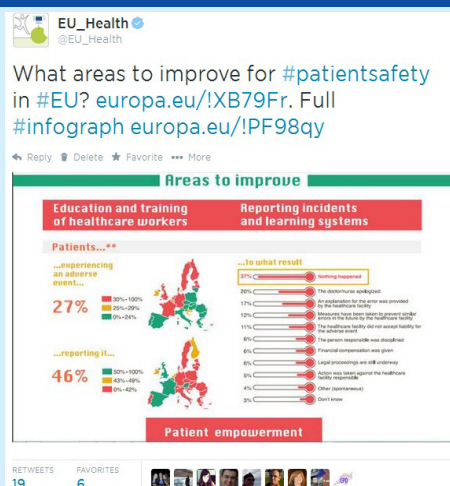
RASFF is more than a tool to support food authorities in their work. Through its new on-line consumer portal, European consumers will

gain accessible and up-to-date information on recall notices and public warnings by health authorities and companies across the EU, enabling them to make more informed purchasing decisions.

Figures from the RASFF 2013 report revealed that a total of 3 205 notifications were recorded, of which 596 were classified as alerts. Of the total number, the vast majority of notifications (82%) concerned food, 8.5% were about feed and another 6.9% concerned food contact materials. The overall number of notifications transmitted through RASFF in 2013 compared to 2012 decreased by 9%.

Ever since its launch in 1979, RASFF has been a vital tool to protect European consumers from dangerous food and emerging food safety risks and may it continue to do so.

### TOP TWEETS



Follow us on Twitter...

@EU\_Consumer

@EU\_Health

## INSTITUTIONAL NEWS

### Formal signing ceremony of the Joint Procurement Agreement on vaccines

On 19 June, the Commission formally signed the Joint Procurement Agreement under which EU countries can procure pandemic vaccines and other medical countermeasures as a group, rather than individually.

This joint procurement mechanism will help protect citizens from serious cross border threats to health. It will also enable Member States to avail of pandemic vaccines and medicines in sufficient quantities and at a correct price, should a cross border health threat emerge.

The mechanism will benefit all EU countries, in particular the ones which encountered difficulties in purchasing vaccines developed for the H1N1 pandemic in 2009.

### Update on GM cultivation – ENV Council

On 12 June, the Environment Council broke the deadlock on the GMO cultivation proposal and reached a political agreement towards a new legal basis giving Member States the choice to restrict or prohibit the cultivation of GMOs on their territory.

This political agreement meets Member States' consistent calls since 2009 to have more flexibility and legal certainty for national decisions on cultivation on their territory or part of their territory.

## EU markets on a gentle rebound

Since 2008, DG SANCO publishes on a regular basis the Consumer Scoreboards, which monitor how the single market is performing for EU consumers and warn of potential problems. The 10th Consumer Markets Scoreboard was published in June, showing that although consumers have once again expressed their dissatisfaction at the performance of some consumer markets, such as banking services, the situation across Europe has seen an improved performance across all markets.

As in previous years, goods markets have appeared to be performing much better than service markets, although the gap between both is narrowing. We have also welcomed an upturn of the previously worst performing markets, such as vehicle fuels and train services. Italy and the Czech Republic have, for example, seen their train services improve greatly, a fact that could be connected to the opening of their markets to competition. On the other hand, some sectors keep on scoring low, such as the banking services, the telecom market, the electricity and gas markets or the second-hand car market.



Neven Mimica  
EU Commissioner for Consumer Policy

The consumer market scoreboard tracks the performance of 52 consumer markets, (accounting for almost 60% of household expenditure) on issues such as comparability, trust, problems and complaints, overall satisfaction, choice and switching. On basis of the conclusions of this scoreboard the Commission will launch two in-depth market studies: a market study on retail electricity and a behavioural study to enhance consumers' reading and the understanding of terms and conditions.

## Patient safety: progress made, more needed

Five years after the Council Recommendation on Patient Safety came into force, the Commission has observed noteworthy progress in patient safety across the EU. 26 EU countries have or are finalising patient safety strategies, patient safety standards are mandatory in 20, and reporting systems on adverse events encountered in hospitals exist in 27 of them.

That said, 53% of respondents to the Eurobarometer on Patient Safety are worried that going to hospital may endanger their health. On a similar note, 65% of respondents to the public consultation on patient safety agreed that the Recommendation improved

patient safety in their countries, but pointed to a low record of awareness in healthcare settings, in particular on informing patients of safety standards and available complaint procedures.

The Commission has identified a series of actions to help Member States improve the situation on the ground. They focus, among others, on developing guidelines to promote patient empowerment, encouraging reporting as a tool to increase patient safety culture, including patient safety in education and training of health professionals and ensuring that all Member States have patient safety standards implemented.



# TRACES: making trade in food safer and faster

## TRACES is 10 years old and has the wind in its sails

Born on 1 April 2004 in the aftermath of the swine fever epidemics, TRACES has been fulfilling a double mission ever since: protect EU consumers by certifying the trade of animals and food products with EU safety standards, and speed up exchanges between its member countries.

Though TRACES started with tracing the trade of live animals and animal products only, its scope has expanded to include tracing the trade of animal-by-products as well as plants, seeds and propagating materials.

TRACES has also attracted an increasing number of traders from around the world, who joined the network on their own accord. To date, the system facilitates trade between

71 member countries worldwide and connects over 28 000 users in 33 languages. It produces more than one million trade certificates every year!

Over time, seven new modules for trade management were added to TRACES' initial certification module for trade within the EU. Of these new modules, one helps monitor animal welfare and the other connects TRACES to RASFF - the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed.

Finally, the ever-evolving TRACES is edging toward paperless certification, in accordance with the Digital Agenda guidelines. It will also soon be connected to EUROPHYT, the EU alert system for Plant Health.

## IN BRIEF

### European study on "Dogs and cats involved in commercial practices"

The internal market with free circulation of goods is one of the fundamental objectives of the EU. However there is a tension between that objective and the ethical aspects related to the commercial movements and trade in dogs and cats throughout Europe.

On 1 July, Commission will launch a survey to gauge the impact of commercial practices on the welfare of dogs and cats. If you wish to take part in the survey, visit <https://sancodogandcat.izs.it>

### Joint Meeting of the HLG and Platform on Nutrition and Physical Activity

On 10 June, a joint meeting of the High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity and the EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health took place in Brussels. The agenda included presentations on the Action Plan on Childhood Obesity and an update from the JRC on scientific developments in the fields of nutrition and physical activity. Next meetings for the Platform and the High Level Group: 25 September and 25 November respectively.

### Reporting on PIP Joint Action Plan under the existing Medical Devices legislation

On 20 June, the EPSCO Council discussed the joint actions taken by the EC and the Member States to restore confidence following the scandal of defective PIP breast implants. The Plan has resulted in substantial progress, with regards to redefining the qualifications and the scope of activities of notified bodies and conducting voluntary joint audits of notified bodies, amongst others.

## Safe products without borders

### International safety week 2014



The 5th International Product Safety Week was organised between the 16th and the 20th of June. This event takes place every two years and gathers consumer product safety professionals and stakeholders from around the globe, representing regulators, businesses, consumer organisations and other experts to work together in advancing product safety issues globally. This year the focus of attention was on strengthening international co-operation and supporting approaches such as "seamless surveillance" to strengthen consumer safety at every point of the supply chain from design to destination.

A number of events were organised during the week:

- The high-level Trilateral EU-China-US Consumer Safety Summit which included discussions on consumer product tracking and traceability and how best to raise awareness about consumer product safety.
- PROSAFE, the umbrella organisation for market surveillance authorities organised an event on how product safety controls can improve with strengthened cooperation between different countries
- Another interesting event, organised together with the OECD, raised awareness on the dangers posed by button batteries. This event was part of a worldwide campaign to ensure button batteries do not end up in the hands of children.

The whole week was deemed a success with high attendance for all the event and pronounced activity on twitter surrounding the main events.

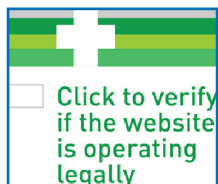




## Buying medicines online?

### Commission introduces a logo to protect all consumers

The market for online medicinal products is booming, but how can consumers tell an authentic online pharmacy from a fake one? Up until now, it has been a potential stab in the dark, but things are changing.



Thanks to a certified logo designed by the Commission, consumers will soon be able to authenticate any website through

which they are considering buying medicines. The logo, once clicked, will

take the potential buyer to the national regulatory authority website, which lists all legally operating online pharmacies and other legally authorised retailers of medicines.

Member States have one year from June 2014 to ensure that all legally authorised pharmacies and retailers bear the logo featuring on this page, as a proof that the medicinal products they sell are safe.

For further information on the logo and the technical requirements to ensure its authenticity, visit the website below.

 [http://ec.europa.eu/health/human-use/falsified\\_medicines/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/human-use/falsified_medicines/index_en.htm)

## Ask the Director General

### The Commission's recent measures to protect plant health in Europe

#### What are your views on the phytosanitary controls & measures on imports versus trade concerns?

Our rules aim to protect crops, fruit, vegetables, flowers, ornamentals and forests from harmful pests and diseases not native to Europe.

We have recently imposed stricter import conditions on citrus fruit (oranges, mandarins, grapefruits, lemons...) from South Africa and prevented imports of some fruits and vegetables, including mangoes from India, to address the risk of introducing foreign pests and diseases into the EU. This decision needed to be taken since a high number of consignments were being intercepted at EU borders with mainly insects such as fruit flies, not native to Europe and potentially



*Paola Testori Coggi  
Director General  
for Health and Consumers*

harmful to our crops.

In doing so, we avoid crops losses and the use of pesticides, while safeguarding our agriculture and production, our forestry and our favourable plant health status.

## COMING UP

### Commission's Communication on Food Sustainability

On 1 July, the Commission will publish new plans to make the European food system more sustainable. The Communication features actions to improve the efficiency of the food system, with short and long-term actions. There are plans for clearer labelling to reduce confusion about "best before" and "use by" dates, and to ensure that safe food that might otherwise be wasted is redistributed as a priority to food banks.

### Joint report on EPAAC and on the implementation report on the Council Recommendation on cancer screening

The report highlights the achievements of the European Partnership against Cancer (EPAAC), such as the adoption by almost all Member States of their respective national plan against cancer. The report also highlights the publication of the European recommendations on screening for colorectal, breast and cervical cancers and the launch of the European initiative on breast cancer. The report is currently in inter-service consultation.

### Implementation report on 2009 Communication Alzheimer disease

The report concludes that the objectives of the Communication were broadly achieved and served to support Member States in their efforts to tackle dementia in an effective and efficient manner.

The report is currently in inter-service consultation.



The views expressed in Health & Consumer Voice do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the European Commission.

© European Union, 2012. Reproduction of articles (excluding photographs) is authorised, except for commercial purposes, provided that the source is mentioned.

Edited by DG Health & Consumers.

[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health\\_consumer/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/index_en.htm)

Email: [sanco-newsletter@ec.europa.eu](mailto:sanco-newsletter@ec.europa.eu)