

Evaluation of guidance on allergen management and consumer information

Area of research interest: [Food hypersensitivity](#)

Study duration: 2008-09-01

Planned completion: 11 December 2008

Project code: T07057

Conducted by: Jigsaw Research

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Background

In 2008, the Agency conducted research to assess the uptake and effectiveness of the guidance produced in 2006 on allergen management and consumer information.

The specific research objectives were to:

- Ascertain levels of awareness amongst businesses and Enforcement Officers (and how they became aware)
- Explore attitudes towards the guidance - does it meet the need for authoritative guidance?
- Understand the impact of the guidance - is it being followed? Has it led to changes?
- Identify any improvements to the content of the guidance (full guidance and leaflet). Understand whether the dissemination of the guidance could be improved
- Establish whether the voluntary 'best practice' nature of the guidance is perceived to be better/more effective or otherwise than compulsory legislation

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Research approach

The project comprised of both qualitative and quantitative research.

For the qualitative stage, a total of 35 in-depth interviews were conducted with: food manufacturers, large retailers, training bodies. Enforcement Officers (EHOs/TSOs).

Most interviews were conducted before the quantitative stage to help inform the quantitative research design. However, 9 in-depth interviews were conducted after the quantitative stage (with respondents who had taken part in the quantitative stage and were identified as giving interesting responses worth further exploration). Some of these follow-up depths were reported as case studies. For the quantitative stage, a total of 382 semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with: free-from food manufacturers (aware of guidance), 27 food manufacturers who ordered a hard copy of the guidance from our Enforcement Officers.

In addition, those food manufacturers screened out of the main interview because they were unaware of the guidance (n=251) were asked a small number of questions to assess perceived usefulness of the guidance and information sources for allergens they currently use.

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Results and findings

Just over a half of the food manufacturers (53%) were aware of either the full guidance or the leaflet. 48% of these were aware of the full guidance, while 22% were aware of the leaflet (with some aware of both). Awareness of either was much higher among large businesses (81%) than 'micro' businesses i.e. those with fewer than 20 employees (37%). Around a half of small-medium sized businesses i.e. those with 20-249 employees were aware of the guidance.

Most manufacturers became aware of the guidance either through internet searches on 'allergens' leading to the guidance on the our website or, particularly in the case of smaller organisations, through their EHO or TSO.

Opinion of the guidance was very positive with 100% of manufacturers rating the full guidance as useful, while 74% did the same for the leaflet. Most of those that did not rate the leaflet as useful, rated the full guidance as useful i.e. the leaflet was not aimed at them and they were fine with this as they used the full guidance instead.

In addition, those manufacturers unaware of the guidance thought it would be useful. These respondents were read a short description of the guidance and asked to say how useful they thought it would be. 83% thought it would very or fairly useful. Over 80% of Enforcement Officers felt the full guidance and the leaflet were useful to both themselves and the businesses they work with. Indeed 96% of Enforcement Officers rated the leaflet as useful for themselves (mainly as an aide memoir) and 88% rated the full guidance as useful for the businesses they deal with. Manufacturers also told us that both the leaflet and particularly the full guidance have had a large impact on their business. Reading the documents had lead to most businesses doing something as a result, ranging from checking their current procedures to fundamental changes to the way they tackle allergens and allergen labelling.

Research report

England, Northern Ireland and Wales

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