



FDA Should Follow Report's Call for Proactive Approach to Food Safety, Louisiana Attorney Says

Louisiana food safety lawyer Richard J. Arsenault says a new IOM report gives the FDA a 'blueprint' for discovering threats and preventing outbreaks of foodborne illnesses.

Alexandria, LA ([PRWEB](#)) July 1, 2010 — The U.S. Food and Drug Administration should adopt a proactive approach to food safety such as the one outlined in a new report by the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, says [Louisiana food safety advocate](#) Richard J. Arsenault.

The 500-page report, requested by Congress 18 months ago after a rash of foodborne illness outbreaks, states that the FDA's current "reactive" model makes inefficient use of its limited resources and relies on a case-by-case approach to gathering and using information on risks.

By switching to a "risk-based" approach outlined in the report, the FDA could better identify problems in the food supply and distribution chain, efficiently direct resources to high-risk areas and catch problems before they turn into widespread outbreaks, the report says.

"More than 300,000 people need to be hospitalized and over 5,000 people die from foodborne illness in America every year, and that number of victims is unacceptable when many of these illnesses could have been prevented," says Arsenault, whose firm, Alexandria-based [Neblett, Beard & Arsenault](#), has represented hundreds of [foodborne illness victims](#) throughout Louisiana and across the country.

"The IOM report, for the most part, sets out a vision for how local, state and federal officials can work together to catch problems before they spread and harm innocent consumers, and I think Congress and the FDA should give serious consideration to its recommendations," Arsenault says. "It's not a perfect plan, but it serves as a good blueprint."

The FDA is charged with ensuring the safety of approximately 80 percent of the nation's food supply, including seafood, fruits, vegetables and dairy products. The federal agency shares food safety responsibility with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which oversees meat, poultry and egg products, as well as state and local agencies, which inspect food production facilities.

According to the IOM report, the FDA needs to adopt a system that would increase coordination with those other agencies, and it needs more authority to carry out its mission through amendments to the federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act – much of which is currently contained in proposed legislation before the Senate.

The report calls for establishing a centralized food safety data center that would collect information, quickly assess risks and take steps to address food safety problems without competing with other agencies for resources.

To enhance its efficiency, the FDA could also delegate food facility inspections to states and establish national



standards for the intensity and frequency of those reviews, the report says.

According to the report, this change would build on current practices in which roughly 60 percent of inspections are already conducted by state inspectors, and it would increase the quality of inspections and avoid duplication of efforts.

The report also asks Congress to consider legislation that would specify the FDA's authority in facility registration, preventive controls, risk-based inspection, mandatory recall, reporting of adulteration and banning of certain food imports if the public's health is at risk.

“What is significant to me about this report is that a committee of experts has clearly stated that our current food safety system is inadequate and in dire need of change,” Arsenault says. “Improvements need to be made.”

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