



## **WFLO Bulletin: Handling and Storing Food Allergens in PRW's**

By Dr. Michael L. Jahncke and Dr. Donald V. Schlimme

### **Introduction**

A food allergy is an immune system response to a food that the body mistakenly believes to be harmful. It is estimated that 2 percent of adults and about 5 percent of infants and young children in the United States suffer from food allergens. About 30,000 individuals require emergency room treatment per year and approximately 150 individuals die annually due to allergic reactions to food.

Although an individual could be allergic to any food, eight major foods or food groups account for 90 percent of food allergies --- these are cow's milk, eggs, fish, Crustacean shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, and soybeans. The primary responsibility for control of allergens in the human diet is placed by the U. S. FDA upon food processing establishments through specific food labeling regulations. Proper labeling allows consumers to determine which foods and food additives are present in the packaged food that they purchase from food stores. Details of these labeling requirements are found in the FDA Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-282, Title II). This document can be accessed via the Google Search Engine.

(<http://www.fda.gov/Food/LabelingNutrition/FoodAllergensLabeling/GuidanceComplianceRegulatoryInformation/ucm106187.htm>). [Accessed 8/13, 2009].

### **PRW Responsibilities**

- Conduct a Hazard Analysis and develop a HACCP plan that includes allergens
- Keep records on the presence of any of the eight major allergen foods and food systems that are received and/or stored at your facilities. Know what major allergen containing foods are stored in your cold store.
- Keep records on which allergen foods in your facility are packaged in sealed, air tight, moisture vapor barrier containers.
- Keep records on which allergen foods present in your facility are packaged in non-air tight, non-moisture vapor barrier packaging. These represent the greatest potential for cross contamination.
- Provide training and document such training to warehouse employees to assure they are aware of which foods you store that are major allergens and which of these are in non-air tight packages.
- Provide designated storage sites for major allergen foods packaged in non-air tight containers so that cross contamination of non-allergens can be eliminated or minimized.
- Establish written procedures for clean-up of allergen foods that escape from their packaging due to accidental damage.
- Establish written procedures for the disposal of all "spills" from damaged packages of allergen foods/



- Establish written procedures to assure adequate cleaning of pallets that have been exposed to or contaminated with spilled allergens.

## Specific Information

Cross contamination can occur in a PRW by 1) accidental spills due to broken, torn or damaged well sealed air-tight containers or by 2) escape of foodstuffs from undamaged, poorly sealed containers such as mesh bags or large totes with only minimal lid security. Cross contamination from poorly sealed containers can occur via air currents as well as spills. Liquid allergen foods such as liquid egg should be stored on the bottom layer of racks so that the product cannot drip down upon non-allergen foods stored below if an egg containing package is broken open.

Pallets that have been contaminated with allergen food should be removed from the cold store and “power washed” outside the facility before it is reused. Spills of allergen foods should be promptly swept-up or vacuumed up and removed from the cold store to an outside “dumpster.”

Following a spill or cross-contamination incident, keep detailed records to document that:

- 1) proper clean-up procedures were followed;
- 2) affected product was removed and segregated;
- 3) contaminated pallets and equipment were properly cleaned to remove allergens; and
- 4) affected product was properly disposed to ensure that it did not enter into commerce.

###

*Donald V. Schlimme, Ph.D is an Emeritus Professor in Nutrition and Food Science at the University of Maryland. Michael L. Jahncke, Ph.D is a Professor/Center Director at the Virginia Tech Virginia Seafood Agricultural Research & Extension Center. Schlimme and Jahncke serve as WFLO Scientific Advisors. Members of the WFLO Scientific Advisory Council are available to members of GCCA core partner organizations to respond to inquiries about food storage and handling. For more information or to ask an inquiry, visit [www.wflo.org](http://www.wflo.org) or call WFLO headquarters at +1 703 373 4300.*