

Health Department Response to Accidents and Impoundment of Vehicles Transporting Food Products

Vehicle accidents and impoundment involving transportation of commercial food supplies have increased significantly in Indiana. Federal, state and local regulatory agencies play an important role in emergency situations involving commercial food supplies. In many cases, decisions must be made at the accident site by regulatory officials to determine if food products are to be destroyed, held for further evaluation, or be returned to the manufacturer.

Truck Wrecks

Truck wrecks involving commercial food supplies may occur during or after normal health department working hours. Accidents of this nature usually require an on-site inspection to evaluate the condition of the food products. In wrecks, the physical impact of the collision usually causes the most damage. Toxic items such as janitorial supplies or vehicle fuel tanks may rupture adding more contamination to the food and food packaging. Exposure to the weather may adversely affect the products. Removal of the wreckage may also cause further physical damage and contamination. The possibility of food or food ingredient runoff contaminating nearby streams or waterways is often overlooked, and for these reasons it is imperative that a trained regulatory official be present to evaluate the situation. The types of food involved, and the location of the accident, are important factors in determining which agency(s) become involved.

In many cases, the health department may determine at the site, that the food product(s) can be off-loaded to another vehicle and routed to an appropriate destination. Procedures to be followed by a local health department include:

1. Information regarding the amount and type of foods involved, description of damage, vehicle identification tags, license numbers, information regarding origin and destination of vehicle should be collected and reported to the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) Food Protection Program at 317-233-7360 within two (2) working days.
2. The local health department accompanied a clean-up truck to a nearby landfill where they witnessed destruction (disposition) of the unsalvageable products.
3. A summary of the accident was completed and submitted to the ISDH Food Protection by the local health department in conjunction with the appropriate disposition forms for the destruction of the product(s).

Vehicle Impoundments

These situations create different problems from truck wrecks. Often the vehicle has equipment failure, or the driver is detained for some reason and the cargo must sit at a weigh station. If the shipment involves potentially hazardous foods, proper product temperature must be maintained at all times. In order to salvage these shipments, arrangements must be made by the firm owning the product to keep the shipment properly refrigerated. The quality and temperature measurement of the food products being held must be evaluated and verified by the health department prior to being released. Assistance from the health department may be requested in the following areas:

1. Finding a secure location (if needed) having the capability of maintaining potentially hazardous food at proper temperatures
2. Notifying appropriate agencies
3. Assisting with determining damage and/or disposition of food products
4. Determining origin, destination or holding point of cargo
5. Verifying temperature and quality of the product(s)
6. Verifying destruction or disposition of product
7. Documenting the investigation appropriately

Emergency Telephone Numbers

Indiana State Department of Health

(317)233-1325

Indiana State Board of Animal Health

(317)544-2400

Indiana State Excise Police – A division of the Alcohol and Tobacco Commission

(317)232-2452

United States Department of Agriculture (complaints and investigations)

USDA (317)290-3350 (leave a message)