Notices

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This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Food Safety and Inspection Service

[Docket No. 98–067N]

Australia's Meat Safety Enhancement Program (MSEP)

AGENCY: Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice; request for comments and public meeting notice.

SUMMARY: The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is announcing the availability of a paper prepared by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) that sets forth its new Meat Safety Enhancement Program (MSEP) for slaughter inspection in establishments that process meat for export to the United States and to other countries. The public may submit comments on the MSEP document in writing or at a public meeting.

DATES: The meeting will be held on February 3, 1999, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Written comments must be received on or before February 16, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the MSEP document are available from the FSIS Docket Clerk, Room 102 Cotton Annex, 300 12th Street, SW, Washington, DC 20250–3700. A copy may also be obtained from the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) homepage at http://www.dpie.gov.au/aqis/homepage/msep1.html. Submit one original and two copies of written comments to the FSIS Docket Clerk, Docket #98–067N, at the address shown above. Facsimile comments may be sent to 202–690–0486. The public can review all received comments in the FSIS Docket Room from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

The meeting will be held at the Washington Plaza Hotel at 10 Thomas Circle NW (at Massachusetts Avenue and 14th Street), Washington, DC 20009, (202) 842–1300. Transcripts of the meeting will be available in the FSIS Docket Room, Room 102, 300 12th Street SW, Washington, DC 20250–3700.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For further information about the MSEP document or to register for the meeting, contact Mr. Mark Manis, Director, International Policy Division; Office of Policy, Program Development, and Evaluation; (202) 720–6400; or by electronic mail to *mark.manis@usda.gov*.

Attendees who require a sign language interpreter or other special accommodation should contact Mr. Mark Manis by January 26, 1999.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

On May 30, 1997, FSIS announced in the **Federal Register** (62 FR 29326) that it was making available a proposal prepared by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) for a new slaughter inspection model, commonly named ''Project 2.'' FSIS sought public comment to determine whether the Australian Project 2 proposal would ensure the safety, wholesomeness, and truthful labeling of product produced under such a system. This determination was necessary in order for the United States to accept meat produced by Australian establishments that would participate in the Project 2 trials.

Results from the **Federal Register** notice indicated strong public support for HACCP and quality assurance systems, such as the Project 2 proposal provided, as effective means to control food processing hazards and thus reduce foodborne illness risks. However, less agreement was evident on the fundamental question raised by Project 2: What level of federal oversight must be provided to establishments that are implementing or have implemented HACCP and quality assurance programs?

FSIS informed AQIS in a letter dated November 7, 1997 [1], as follows: ''While the Project 2 protocol provides adequate assurances that process control is likely to be maintained in participating establishments, we find the proposed form and intensity of federal oversight to be inadequate to verify, over time, in normal operating conditions, that these controls will be maintained. While FSIS encourages and supports your efforts to demonstrate how Australian meat plants operate under plant controlled HACCP and quality assurance systems, we believe that the combination of sweeping change in establishment processing techniques and a shift from command and control inspection presents uncertainties that require federal oversight of a type and intensity greater than that proposed by Project 2.''

FSIS also advised AQIS that it would consider the Project 2 proposal further if it were modified to provide a level of federal oversight that is equivalent to that which will be employed by the United States through its inspection models project that was then under development.

On January 6, 1998, AQIS wrote to FSIS and proposed options for increased Federal oversight as a means to advance its Project 2 proposal. The substance of these options was that AQIS would agree to provide direct inspector oversight and verification of establishment sorting operations. FSIS answered this proposal in a letter dated February 3, 1998 [2], as follows:

''This responds to your letter of January 6, 1998, in which you proposed additional Federal oversight for your planned Project 2 trials. In summary, we find the enhanced level of oversight you propose an encouraging step toward an agreement on equivalence.

''Our inspection models project is commencing its baseline phase this spring and we invite Australia to join with us in a parallel endeavor to determine the most appropriate form and intensity of oversight for meat establishments that operate under HACCP. By working together in a collegial fashion, we can resolve equivalence issues incrementally as they arise. For example, as U.S. establishments that participate in our inspection models project accept responsibility for meeting FSIS performance standards they will take over some of the on-line functions now being performed by Federal inspectors. These establishments will continue to be eligible to ship product for sale in commerce because plant sorters will operate under direct oversight by FSIS inspectors.

''If AQIS were to modify its * * * proposal to include the additional baseline data collections * * *, develop performance standards to compare establishment effectiveness with Federal inspection

[1] The FSIS Docket Room has a copy of the letter for public inspection.

[2] The FSIS Docket Room has a copy of the letter for public inspection.

effectiveness, incorporate direct oversight of establishment sorting activities and a combination of organoleptical and microbiological sampling at a level sufficient to detect noncompliance, and agree to proceed collaboratively with FSIS during the development of new HACCP-based inspection models, the United States would be willing to accept meat produced by establishments that participate in the * * * trials.''

In August 1998, AQIS submitted its proposal for a new slaughter inspection system described as the ''Meat Safety Enhancement Program'' (MSEP). Copies are available from the FSIS Docket Clerk.

Determination of Equivalence

As a result of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures (commonly referred to as the ''SPS Agreement''), contracting parties, including the United States, are committed to harmonizing their human, animal, and plant health import requirements by basing their sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) import requirements on ''equivalent'' sanitary measures or standards. Among other things, the SPS Agreement obliges the United States to respond to requests by other contracting parties to establish the equivalence of specified meat and poultry processing measures with those of the United States.

The Australian Government has formally requested that the United States consider its MSEP proposal to pilot-test a revised slaughter inspection system. FSIS has conducted a review of the AQIS MSEP document with particular emphasis on three criteria:

(1) Does the MSEP adequately respond to oversight concerns raised by FSIS in its November 7, 1997 letter (referenced above)?

(2) Does the MSEP meet all conditions presented by FSIS in its February 3, 1998 letter (referenced above)?

(3) Does the MSEP provide an equivalent level of public health protection guaranteed by FSIS slaughter inspection methods?

FSIS has reviewed the MSEP document, and it appears that these three criteria are appropriately met in that direct continuous Federal oversight and verification of establishment slaughter operations would be provided for and all other specified conditions have been met. Additionally, FSIS has compared MSEP sanitary measures with those provided by its HACCP-based Inspection Models Project, and finds that these two programs appear to be conceptually similar in design.

However, before making any decisions or taking any action on the MSEP document, FSIS has decided to request public comment on it.

Done at Washington, D.C. on: January 8, 1999.

Thomas J. Billy,

Administrator.

[FR Doc. 99–928 Filed 1–14–99; 8:45 am]

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ARCHITECTURAL AND TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS COMPLIANCE BOARD

Electronic and Information Technology Access Advisory Committee; Meeting

AGENCY: Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: The Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board) has established an advisory committee to assist it in developing a proposed rule on accessibility standards for electronic and information technology covered by the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998. This document gives notice of the dates, times, and location of the next meeting of the Electronic and Information Technology Access Advisory Committee (Committee).

DATES: The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled for February 8 and 9, 1999, beginning at 9:30 a.m. and ending at 5:00 p.m. each day.

ADDRESSES: The meetings will be held at 1331 F Street, NW., Washington, DC, in the third floor training room.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Doug Wakefield, Office of Technical and Information Services, Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board, 1331 F Street, NW., suite 1000, Washington, DC 20004–1111. Telephone number (202) 272–5434 extension 39 (Voice); (202) 272–5449 (TTY). E-mail address: wakefield@access-board.gov. This document is available in alternate formats (cassette tape, Braille, large print, or computer disk) upon request. This document is also available on the Board's Internet Site at http://www.access-board.gov/notices/eitaacmtg.htm.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On September 29, 1998, the Access Board published a notice appointing 23 members to its Electronic and Information Technology Access Advisory Committee (Committee). 63 FR 51891 (September 29, 1998). The Committee will make recommendations to the Access Board on accessibility standards for electronic and information technology covered by the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998. The Committee is composed of Federal agencies and Federal contractors; the electronic and information technology industry; organizations representing the access needs of individuals with disabilities; and other persons affected by accessibility standards for electronic and information technology. At its first meeting on October 15 and 16, 1998, the Committee took the following actions:

- Added Compaq Computers, Pitney Bowes, Sun Microsystems, and the Information Technology Industry Council to the Committee;
- Formed three subcommittees. One subcommittee will examine the definitions needed for the recommended standards. Another subcommittees will examine the various functions that are performed by electronic and information technology. These functions include creating, processing, transmitting, and interacting with information and the technology involved. A third subcommittee will begin the process of classifying the variety of products covered by the standards into product families;
- Created a listserv to facilitate communications between meetings. To subscribe to the listserv send an e-mail message to: listproc@trace.wisc.edu.; and
- Established a schedule of meeting dates. In addition to the meeting on February 8–9, 1999, the Committee will meet again on March 29–30, 1999 and, May 11–12, 1999.

At its second meeting on December 1 and 2, 1998, the Committee addressed the scope of the standards it will be recommending to the Access Board. This included defining the term ''electronic and information technology.'' A three person group was appointed to develop a recommended definition and present it to the Committee at its January meeting.

Additionally, four subcommittees were formed. These include: installation and setup, information presentation, control and operation, and user information. The subcommittees will examine these specific areas and identify access barriers in each area, and recommend standards that could lower or eliminate these barriers. The subcommittees will continue their work on the listserv.

During the January meeting, the committee adopted a working definition for electronic and information technology based on the definition of information technology in the Clinger-Cohen Act of 1996 (40 U.S.C. 1401(3)).