

# HUSH NEWSLETTER

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## Welsh butcher pleads guilty

William Tudor, 54, from Cowbridge, Vale of Glamorgan has been jailed for a year for food safety offences which led to a fatal E.coli outbreak in 2005. Tudor admitted six charges, including supplying contaminated meat from his meat business in Bridgend and the court heard his premises failed to guard against the risk of cross-contamination. Judge Neil Bidder said that while Tudor was a pillar of society he had substantial culpability and a custodial sentence would send out a message to other food producers. He told Tudor that he put the health of the public at risk for the sake of saving money.

Tudor's business, John Tudor and Son, had a contract to supply cooked meats for school dinners at primary schools across south Wales. Within days of the contaminated cooked meat being delivered in September 2005, a number of pupils fell ill with symptoms of diarrhoea. It developed into the UK's second largest outbreak and Tudor's plant was closed down.

Cardiff Crown Court heard that a vacuum-packing machine, "wrongly used" for both raw and cooked meats, was the source of contaminated meat to schools. "There was blood on the trays and workers were having to wipe it off while they were packing cooked meat. "One employee said he was told by Tudor not to use the vacpacker for cooked meat whenever food inspectors were visiting."

Health inspectors found "fundamental failures" in cleaning, including congealed debris and dirt on the vacpacker. "Tudor was asked how it was cleaned and he produced a dirty brush and bucket." Prosecutor Graham Walters said: "There was a simple failure to guard against the risk of cross contamination. Cleaning was inadequate."

The conclusion of criminal proceedings linked to the outbreak in South Wales means that the Public Inquiry is now free to complete its task. Set up by the National Assembly after the outbreak in September 2005, the Inquiry's progress has been affected by the police investigation into the death of Mason Jones and subsequently by the prosecution brought by the local authorities.

Professor Hugh Pennington, the Chairman of the Inquiry, said: "I had hoped that the Inquiry could start its hearings before the end of this year. Unfortunately, the time taken for the local authority proceedings to reach their conclusion means that this isn't possible. The Inquiry is moving forward as quickly as possible but has to obtain evidence from a substantial number of people that could not be approached until now. Although this is a considerable task in itself, it is already in hand and I now expect the Inquiry's hearings to start in February. I am committed to getting to the bottom of matters surrounding the outbreak. The Inquiry has always had an important role to play by undertaking a thorough investigation, by making the facts available to the public, and by making recommendations to prevent such an outbreak from happening again.

I will ensure that the public gets answers to questions about the outbreak and issues around it, particularly those individuals and families who were affected by it. However, it is essential that all the facts are obtained before conclusions are drawn.

Five year old Mason Jones died in hospital two weeks after eating the contaminated ham and turkey at his school canteen and 157 others were infected. After sentencing Mason's mum, Sharon Mills, said life without her son was "...unbearable. I just can't believe he died from a school dinner".

LEAD THE FIGHT AGAINST FOOD BORN

# **ACMSF publishes burger report**

The Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food (ACMSF) has published its report on the “Safe Cooking of Burgers” following a consultation on the document.

HUSH first became aware of this issue in 2005, when it was announced at an ACMSF meeting that an American fast-food organisation had sought to have the cooking times for burgers reduced.

The ACMSF had been asked by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) for their view on whether the current UK advice, issued by the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) in 1998 was still appropriate. This recommends that burgers are cooked at 70°C for two minutes or equivalent.

An Ad Hoc Group was set up to look into the matter further and their findings were made available after HUSH successfully fought to have the name of the organisation and other information made public using the Freedom of Information Act.

HUSH was concerned that the review lacked transparency and openness and lodged a formal complaint with the Information Commissioner. Unpublished research on the epidemiology of E. coli O157 was withheld on the basis that it would be published at a later date and information from the fast food organisation (subsequently identified as McDonalds) was withheld on the basis that the information was provided by another person in confidence and disclosed to the Ad Hoc Group in private.

McDonald’s claim that the current temperature/time conditions “*led to overcooking and associated deterioration in the quality of some products*” was not backed up with any real evidence.

The Group’s draft report suggested that there were few outbreaks in the UK in which burgers could be identified as the contaminated food vehicle and no recent outbreaks in which burgers from fast food restaurants have been implicated.

However, the latest figures from the Haemolytic Uraemic Syndrome (HUS) enhanced surveillance carried out between 2003-05 by Health Protection Scotland, indicate that it was not possible to identify the source of 54% of VTEC linked cases.

However, The nature of the fast food restaurant business, with the quick turnover of food and individual burgers being consumed by individual consumers, would tend to decrease the likelihood of an outbreak, but increase the likelihood of individual cases—where the source is notoriously difficult to identify.

The issue was finally extended for public consultation and the final ACMSF report concluded that the CMO’s advice for the safe cooking of burgers should not change and remain at 70°C for two minutes or equivalent. However it also concluded that the use of lower time/temperature combinations should not be ruled out where producers are in a position to demonstrate that they would be able to consistently ensure that the final product is safe and that the process is under effective control. The report recommended that the FSA produce guidance on the appropriate use of such time/temperature controls for industry and asked that advice to consumers and caterers on the cooking of burgers should also be reiterated.



*The report is available in hard copy from the ACMSF secretariate (e-mail: [acmsf@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:acmsf@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk)) quoting document reference FSA/1183/0607. It is also available on the FSA website at: [food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/acmsfburgers0807.pdf](http://food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/acmsfburgers0807.pdf)*

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