



Q3Newsletter

OCTOBER 2020

Recall Recap

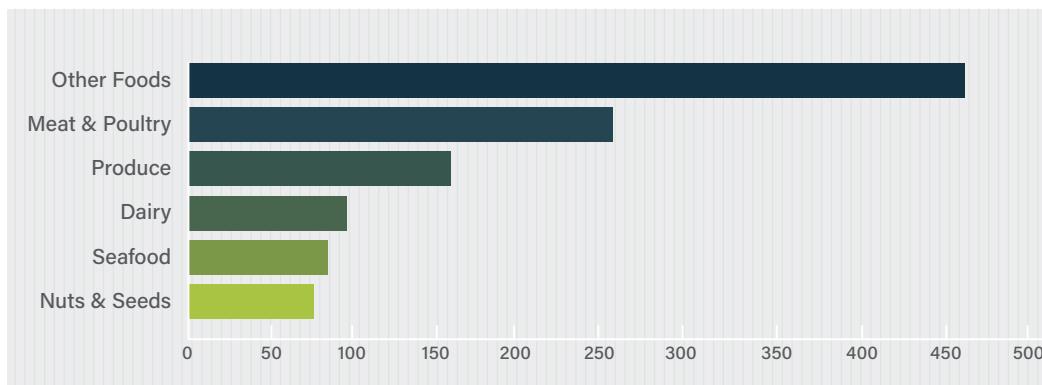
In Q3 2020, there were:

924 food-related alerts reported

72 Class I recalls
29 Class II recalls
15 Class III recalls

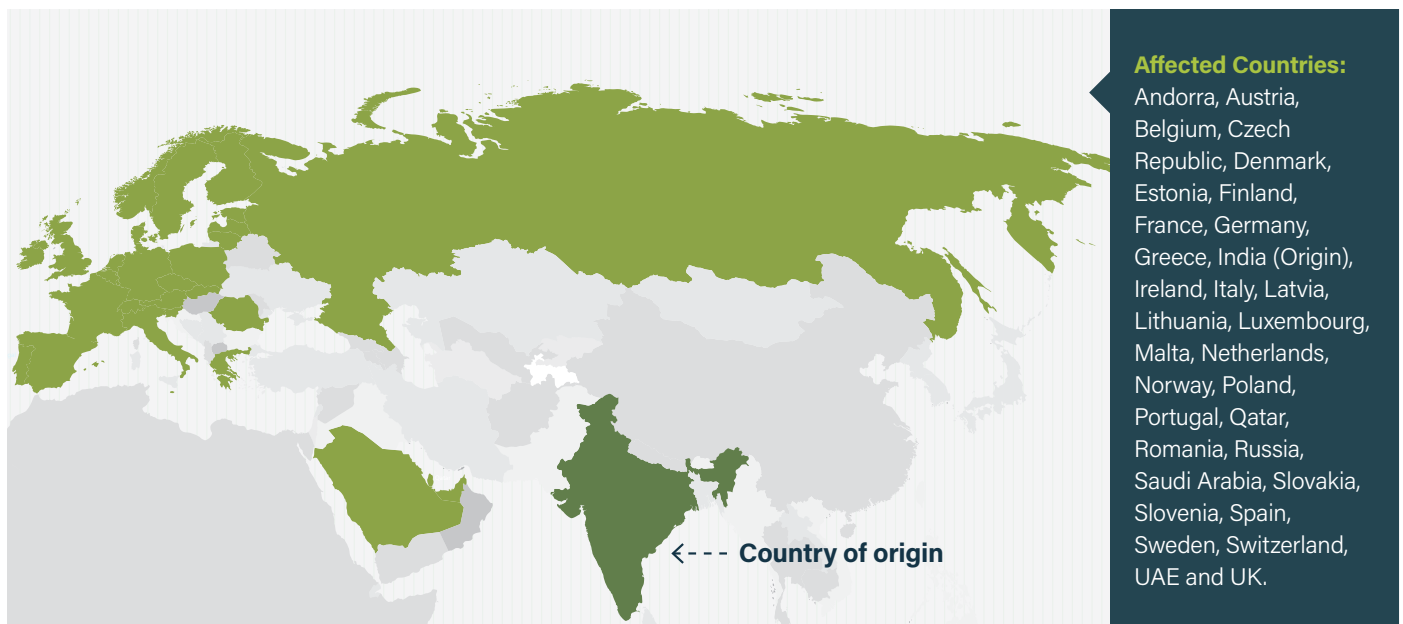
24% stories reported due to undeclared allergens

27 recalls of meat, dairy & fish substitute products



Data Spotlight: Sesame Seed Recalls Due to Ethylene Oxide Levels

Excessive Ethylene Oxide levels in sesame seeds from India prompted the recall of bread mixes and bagel products in over twenty countries in the month of September. The gas is used as a sterilization agent to prevent microbiological contamination from accumulating on crops. While this practice is allowed and the product is registered in the United States and Canada, the E.U. prohibits its use as plant protection. After regular or long-term exposure, ethylene oxide increases the risk of cancer — the chemical compound was classified as a carcinogen by the EPA in 2016. As of October 13th, there were 43 separate recalls reported in relation to this event.



Toxic & Mislabeled Hand Sanitizer Recalls Continue

Sanitizing products have always been a pillar of food safety plans for processors, restaurants, and retail stores, but their use is more widespread than ever as a result of COVID-19; the CDC has stated that practicing hand hygiene and using hand sanitizing products is an effective way to decrease the spread of infection. Though COVID is not spread via contaminated food products, every step of the food chain has become more cautious and more vigilant in terms of health and safety standards, specifically concerning sanitization.

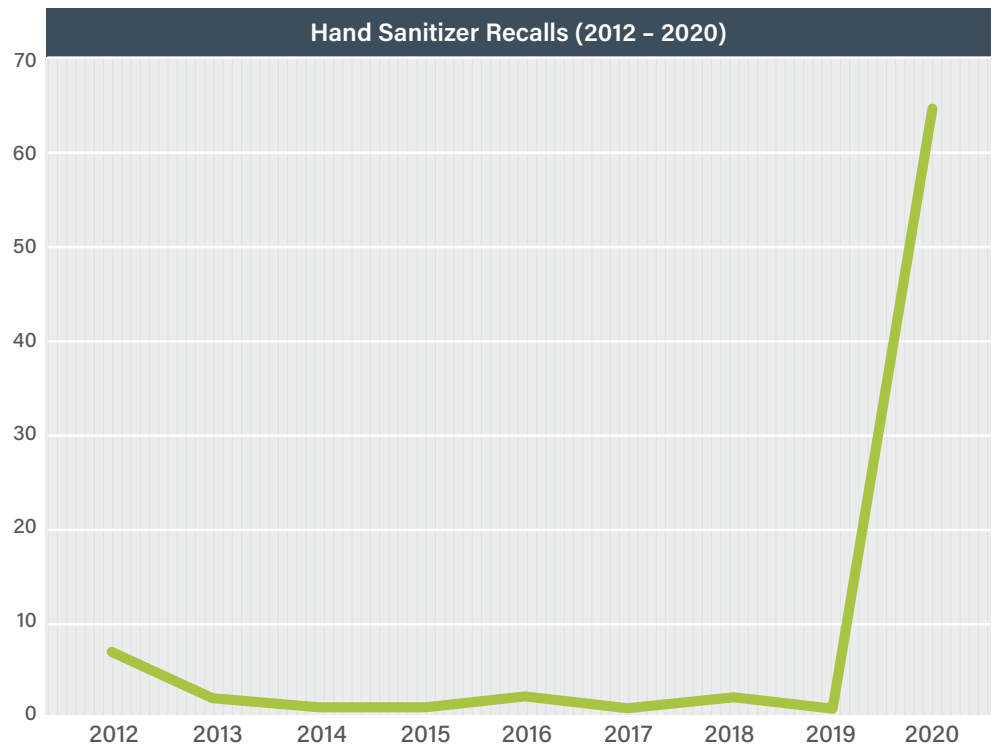
Demand for sanitizing and disinfectant products has soared during the pandemic at both the individual and commercial level — retailers have had to ration supplies, online vendors have hiked prices, and non-traditional businesses such as distilleries have stepped in to address increased demand. But this demand has also left manufacturers with a shortage of ethanol, the standard active ingredient in hand sanitizers. Its highly toxic substitute, methanol (or wood alcohol) became a cause for product recalls, hospitalizations, permanent damage/illness, and even death.

In June of this year, the FDA first alerted consumers of a voluntary recall of hand sanitizer due to the potential presence of methanol. By July, the agency observed an increase in products labeled to contain ethanol, but that tested positive for methanol contamination. Consequently, reports of adverse reactions also rose. In response, a list of products to avoid was released (and continues to be updated) by the FDA, with additions made as recently as September 24th.

Related hand sanitizer recalls persisted through the rest of the summer. On August 12th, the FDA warned consumers about sanitizers labeled as containing ethanol or isopropyl, but instead containing 1-propanol, another toxic and potentially life-threatening ingredient.

Hand sanitizers continued to be added to import alerts to stop products from entering the U.S. market and Warning Letters continued to be issued. By the end of August, another recall event occurred warning of hazardous products: alcohol-based hand sanitizers were found packaged in food and drink containers, including water bottles and beer cans. Some even contained (or were labeled as having) flavoring.

Historically, our data shows that hand sanitizers have not been the subject of a large recall event in recent years. Since these events began over the summer, we have reported 64 recalls — including over 200 different varieties - of sanitizing sprays, gels, and wipes due to undeclared methanol, the inclusion of technical-grade ethanol or 1-Propanol, and/or missing risk statements.



If you have any inquiries about this report or if you are not already subscribing to our COVID-19 Weekly Round-up, please email amelesius@foodtrack.net.