

SECURITY NEWS



Safety and Security Go Hand-In-Hand

Import Safety Action Plan: Increasing Protection of American Consumers

On November 6, 2007, the Interagency Working Group on Import Safety presented to President Bush its Action Plan, which contains recommendations for continuing to improve the safety of imports entering the United States.

While the plan addresses safety of imported foods and other products, it stresses the importance of security measures to safeguard Americans as well. The plan notes that the two measures can be implemented for a synergistic strategy to protect the American public.

- **The Action Plan proposes a strategy focused on a risk-based prevention with verification model that allocates import safety resources based on risk.** The Action Plan proposes steps to replace the current "snapshot" approach to import safety, in which inspections are made at the border, with a cost-effective, prevention-focused model that maximizes the impact of public and private safeguards by identifying and targeting critical points in the import life cycle where risk is greatest and focusing attention and resources on these areas.

Highlights Of The Action Plan's Recommendations

- 1. Creating a Stronger Certification Process.** Certification can be a powerful tool to foster compliance with U.S. safety standards while facilitating trade. This would help "shrink the haystack" and better target resources on the greatest threats. In addition, voluntary certification should be encouraged for foreign manufacturers of other products. Products certified as meeting U.S. safety standards could receive expedited entry.
- 2. Encouraging Good Importer Practices.** The Action Plan recommends

the adoption of best practices to improve import safety and benefit consumers by providing incentives to importers to maintain the highest safety practices for products that carry greater risks.

- 3. Increasing Transparency.** The names of certified producers and importers of record that import products only from certified producers could be made public, so that consumers and distributors can make more informed decisions about product safety.
- 4. Exchanging Import Data.** The importing community, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and other Federal agencies will exchange real-time product and compliance data on each import transaction to better inform decisions to clear or reject import shipments. The Action Plan also recommends that strategic information sharing agreements be concluded with key foreign governments, in order to facilitate the exchange of import and recall data.
- 5. Increasing U.S. Presence Overseas.** Product safety should be a guiding principle of U.S. cooperative agreements with foreign governments. It will also be important to increase training for foreign inspection agencies to build the capacity of foreign governments to ensure the safety of products exported to the United States. In addition, increasing our physical presence abroad and working with foreign governments and manufacturers will help ensure compliance with U.S. safety standards.
- 6. Enhancing Standards.** Congress should give import safety and inspection agencies the ability to strengthen their standards, where needed. These new

authorities should take into consideration industry best practices in order to leverage the knowledge and experience of those who best understand how the products are made.

- 7. Strengthening Penalties.** To hold both foreign and domestic entities accountable and discourage the sale of unsafe products, the Federal government will take steps to strengthen penalties against entities that violate U.S. laws, providing a significant incentive to comply with U.S. requirements.

Even As Agencies Implement The Action Plan's Recommendations, Other Import Safety Initiatives Are Already Underway

The Working Group presented President Bush with a Strategic Framework to increase import safety that called for several immediate steps. One of these steps was a directive to Federal agencies to accelerate their participation in an automated "single window" system for reporting imports electronically. This will enable better coordination and efficiency to permit information exchange among government agencies and between the government and the importing community in real time.

Background On The Interagency Working Group On Import Safety

President Bush established the Import Safety Working Group on July 18, 2007, to conduct a comprehensive review of the U.S. import system and identify ways to further increase the safety of imports entering the United States. The Working Group is comprised of 12 Federal departments and agencies.

More information on the Import Safety Working Group and the full text of the Import Safety Action Plan may be accessed at: www.importsafety.gov.