

Chemical and Biological Threats to Food Retailers

SCOPE: This product provides awareness of potential chemical and biological threats to the US food industry at the point-of-sale and highlights preventive measures, considerations and resources for public safety and private sector stakeholders.

BEHAVIORIAL INDICATORS



- Long or otherwise noteworthy visits without purchase (surveillance)
- Entering with packages and non-empty bags
- Purposeful and unusual attempts to avoid contact with employees
- Employees working in areas outside of their department without authorization
- Suspicious requests or inquiries
- Attempts to access restricted areas or unscheduled distributor activity
- Improper uniforms, credentials, or identification or the lack thereof
- Equipment tampering
- Unnecessary off-hour access requests

PHYSICAL INDICATORS



- Unusual produce bruising, discoloring, appearance, and smells
- Unexpected rotting or presence of powders
- Punctured or tampered food, beverage, or health and beauty products
- Abandoned packaging, open packages, or broken seals
- Fraudulent food labels
- Misaligned product codes
- Suspicious objects or items (needles, spray bottles)

CHEMICAL INDICATORS



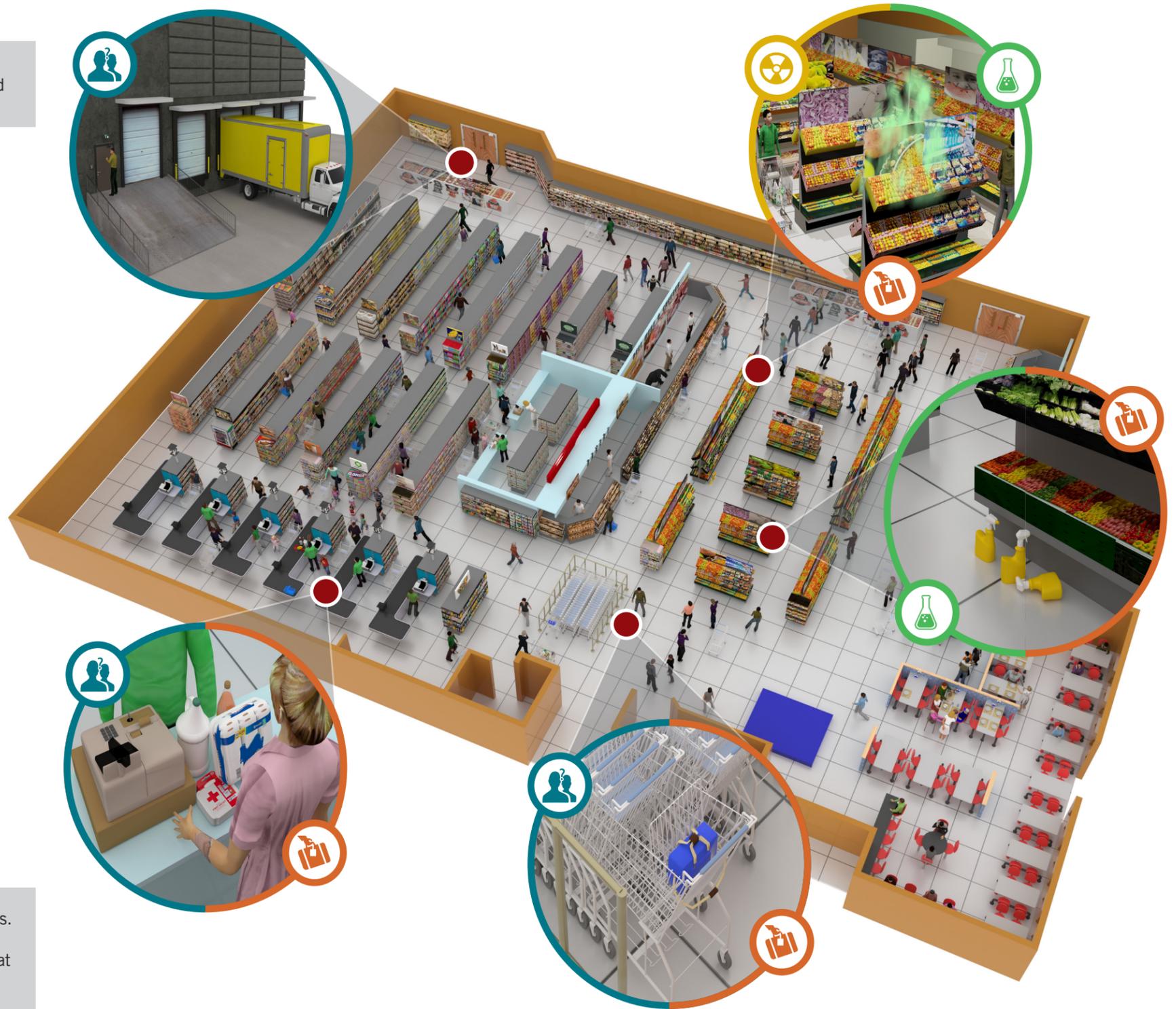
- Reports of a device that disperses a mist or vapor
- Unexplained burns or injuries
- Multiple or mass casualties exhibiting similar symptoms for no apparent reason and without physical trauma
- Reports of unusual odors
- Presence of PPE inconsistent with use in retail food establishments
- Suspicious or unexplained packages, vehicles, devices or containers
- Explosion with little or no structural damage

BIOLOGICAL INDICATORS



- Reports of unusual odors, or devices that dispersed a mist or vapor
- Multiple or mass casualties exhibiting similar symptoms for no apparent reason and with no physical trauma
- Presence of personal protective equipment (PPE) unsuitable for use in retail food establishments
- Suspicious or unexplained packages, vehicles, devices or containers
- Disease cases that are unusual for a given geographic area or transmission season

WARNING: Some of the activities described may be constitutionally protected and innocuous. The totality of behavioral indicators should be evaluated for law enforcement response or action. The activities should not be reported absent articulable facts and circumstances that support an assessment that the observed behavior is not innocent, but rather reasonably indicative of violent or criminal activity, including those associated with terrorism.



NOTICE: This is a Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team (JCAT) product. JCAT is a collaboration by NCTC, DHS, the FBI, and state, local, tribal, and territorial government personnel to improve information sharing and enhance public safety. The product promotes coordination among intergovernmental authorities and the private sector in identifying, preventing, and responding to terrorist activities. Consider the enclosed information within the context of existing laws, regulations, authorities, agreements, policies or procedures. For additional information contact us at JCAT@NCTC.GOV. **This document is best printed in 11 X 17.**

Chemical and Biological Threats to Food Retailer *(continued)*

Point-of-sale¹ food retailers nationwide, such as supermarkets, supercenters, warehouse groceries, membership clubs, and gourmet and convenience stores, may be vulnerable to attacks with chemical² or biological³ materials, although overall interest in such attack methods remains low. Both domestic and international terrorists have promoted attacks against soft targets, including US food industry retail locations. Although we have yet to observe a sustained interest in targeting retail food establishments they may be an attractive target because of their accessibility and the potential for an attack to create significant harm. Violent extremists, possibly to stoke fear, have advocated through online platforms for people to poison or tamper with food in grocery stores:

- In March 2020, US-based violent extremists encouraged followers online to contaminate US food supplies including food retailers such as grocery stores with COVID-19 by coughing on food.
- In March 2020, ISIS supporters distributed an online magazine encouraging attacks, including poisoning food and water.
- In January 2019, ISIS supporters posted a message on social media, threatening to poison the food that a member of British royalty bought at a local supermarket.
- In September 2018, pro-ISIS media group Muharir al-Ansar published an English-language poster on social media stating, "O Crusaders...In your food you will find special flavors that we have prepared for you, so wait and behold."

POTENTIAL INDICATORS OF A CHEMICAL OR BIOLOGICAL ATTACK: First responders, public safety officials, and food retail personnel should familiarize themselves with the potential indicators of contamination. The intentional contamination of food may not be immediately recognizable until law enforcement investigations and lab testing is complete. Therefore, emergency medical services, public health, and hospital personnel may be the first to recognize indicators of chemical or biological material use, including the delayed onset of indicators. Knowledge of which indicators to look for can help first responders determine the proper resource requests, improve response times and efforts, enhance threat reporting and information sharing, and help guide investigations.

PRIVATE SECTOR PREVENTIVE MEASURES: Retail products may be vulnerable to contamination or tampering, highlighting the importance for retailers to implement and practice active safety measures to lower such risks. The following measures may aid in the prevention of chemical or biological attacks:

- Conduct routine screening, vetting and supervising of employees, including contractors, distributors and vendors, to prevent unauthorized access to restricted areas during all hours.
- Notify appropriate authorities if a food-related emergency or suspicious incident occurs.
- Maintain records of returned goods.
- Ensure the traceability and recall of products.
- Maintain control and chain of custody of potential evidence for investigators and law enforcement, such as the US Department of Agriculture, US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and FBI.

- Keep possible or suspected tampered goods that may serve as evidence for law enforcement.
- Perform routine checks for products (food, medicine, and health and beauty supplies) with damaged or compromised packaging, and evidence of adulteration.
- Increase surveillance and make random checks in restricted areas (receiving or loading docks, chemical storage closets, misting systems, backroom storage spaces and coolers), particularly in those areas that lack security cameras.
- Routinely check for modifications, functionality, and cleanliness of equipment and appliances.
- Routinely check for appropriate temperatures of refrigerated cases.
- Maintain awareness of current threats against food retailers, and establish an information-sharing network with other retailers.
- If you see something, say something[©]

PUBLIC SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: First responders can benefit from incorporating the following actions into their training, exercises, and response efforts:

- Establish and isolate command post and triage locations at safe distances to avoid contaminating or infecting first responders.
- Determine PPE and quarantine requirements to prevent further contaminating or infecting public space and responding personnel.
- Seal points of ingress/egress to prevent contaminants from escaping.
- Establish a single point of contact who is familiar with the potential threat and the interior layout of a retail location to maintain clear lines of communication and enable information sharing.
- Maintain information potentially useful to an investigation, including purchase histories, receipts with time of purchase to determine potential agents, predicted illness outcomes, and surveillance footage.
- Know hospital locations capable of responding to potential chemical and biological attacks.
- Be familiar with agency-specific intelligence- and information-sharing practices. This can include memorandums of understanding, media strategies, and appropriate reporting procedures to hospitals, laboratories, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



RESOURCES

CDC

- Website: www.cdc.gov
- List of Nationally Notifiable Conditions: www.cste.org/resource/resmgr/PDFs/CSTENotifiableConditionListA.pdf
- Laboratory Response Network (LRN): <https://emergency.cdc.gov/lrn/index.asp>
- PULSENET: <https://www.cdc.gov/pulsenet>

DHS

- DHS National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center (NBACC): <https://dhs.gov>
- DHS Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Center for Domestic Preparedness (CDP): Visit <https://cdp.dhs.gov/> or contact 1-866-213-9553
- "Managing the Emergency Consequences of Terrorist Incidents: Interim Planning Guide for State and Local Governments:" <http://www.fema.gov/pdf/plan/managingemerconseq.pdf>

FDA

- To find your local Office of Criminal Investigations field office: <https://www.fda.gov/inspections-compliance-enforcement-and-criminal-investigations/criminal-investigations>
- Food Defense Mitigation Strategies: <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-defense-tools-educational-materials/mitigation-strategies-database>
- "Guidance for Industry: Food Security Preventive Measures Guidance for Retail Food Stores and Food Service Establishments:" <https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/guidance-industry-food-security-preventive-measures-guidance-retail-food-stores-and-food-service>

FBI

- FBI WMD "Food Defense Awareness and Outreach" Brochure: <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/commercial-facilities-food-defense.pdf/view>
- FBI Joint Criminal and Epidemiological Investigations Handbook (2016): <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/joint-criminal-and-epidemiological-investigations-handbook-2016-international-edition/view>

US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID):
<https://www.usamriid.army.mil/education/instruct.htm>

¹ Point-of-sale is the physical structure where food and related goods are retailed and sold.

² Chemical threat agents can be poisonous vapors, aerosols, liquids, or solids that have toxic effects on people. The chemicals can be naturally occurring in the environment or synthetically produced.

³ Biological threat agents are biological pathogens or toxins that pose a severe threat to public, animal, and/or plant health through accidental or deliberate misuse.





PRODUCT FEEDBACK FORM

(U) JCAT MISSION: To improve information sharing and enhance public safety. In coordination with the FBI and DHS, collaborate with other members of the IC to research, produce, and disseminate counterterrorism (CT) intelligence products for federal, state, local, tribal and territorial government agencies and the private sector. Advocate for the CT intelligence requirements and needs of these partners throughout the IC.

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PRODUCT TITLE:



ADDITIONAL COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS, OR QUESTIONS.

WHAT TOPICS DO YOU RECOMMEND?

