

National Performance Review Board's "Hammer Award" Recognizes Sea Grant Program's Seafood Safety Efforts

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GATLINBURG, TN. The National Sea Grant College Program's efforts to promote seafood safety and help the United States seafood industry meet U.S. Food and Drug Administration Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP, pronounced HASS-ip) requirements will be honored today with the presentation of the "National Performance Review Hammer Award." The National Seafood HACCP Alliance as represented by its four major partners - The National Sea Grant College Program, The Sea Grant Extension Service, The Association of Food and Drug Officials, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration - will receive the award at the Association of Food and Drug Officials of the Southern States meeting in Gatlinburg, TN. The award is given by Vice President Gore to "partnerships that make a significant contributions in improving the way Federal agencies accomplish their responsibilities."

The awards will be presented by Linda Walker who serves as Director of the Vice President's National Performance Evaluation Project which promotes efficiency in government services and departments. Representing the partnership in accepting the award will be Steve Otwell from the Sea Grant Extension Service, Shirley Fiske, from the National Sea Grant Program Office, Dan Smyly from AFDO, and Gary German from the FDA.

The Hammer Award is derived from the mythical \$600 hammers purchased by a government agency some years ago. In this case the Hammer Award consists of a \$6.00 hammer tied with ribbon and a signed card from the Vice President, all mounted in an aluminum frame.

The National Sea Grant College Program is a program funded by the U.S. Department of Commerce and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to conduct scientific research, technology transfer and outreach. It is organized into 29 state programs and involves scientists and outreach specialists at over 300 of the nation's universities and colleges.

The National Seafood HACCP Alliance is a story of government agencies partnering with industry and academia to implement a federal mandate. Partners, drawn together by the National Sea Grant College Program, include the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Cooperative States Research, Education and Extension Services, the National Sea Grant College Program Sea Grant Extension Services, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the National Fisheries Institute, National Food Processors Association, Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference, the Association of Food and Drug Officials, and state agencies dealing with health, food safety and commerce. The Alliance developed a uniform national HACCP education, training and technical assistance program for the seafood industry and for federal, state and local food inspectors.

The Alliance has spent the past two years developing and integrating materials into a core seafood HACCP curriculum, with the North Carolina Sea Grant program assembling the curriculum into a training guide and distributing it. The training manual, now available in English and Spanish, is also being translated into Chinese and Portuguese. It is packaged with the FDA's "Fish and Fisheries Products Hazards and Controls Guide." More than 6,000 copies of the combined packages had been sold as of September 1, 1997. The training guide, which is deliberately not copyrighted to encourage duplication, is in use in other countries, including China and several South American nations.

HACCP is becoming the world standard for food safety, is required by the European Union, and is in wide use in Canada. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has issued HACCP guidelines for beef and poultry industries to be phased in over a four-year period ending in 2000.

The National Sea Grant College Program, by pulling together existing resources and programs, and coordinating the efforts of the 29 individual Sea Grant programs, has provided the training to begin a

revolutionary safety-assurance process for the entire U.S. seafood industry. And it was done for less than \$85,000 a year (an overall four-year investment of about \$340,000).

Nationally, the Sea Grant/Alliance training program had issued Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO) certifications to 440 individuals as of Sept. 1, qualifying them as HACCP course instructors. That group of teachers has certified 5,000 more in HACCP procedures. That includes 3,000 members of the seafood industry, more than 1,500 regulators and seafood inspectors at the federal, state and local levels, and more than 500 technicians from academia and consulting groups. It is anticipated that about 1,000 people per month will be trained in HACCP procedures between now and December.

Sea Grant ensured effective HACCP training without the creation of a costly new program by forming the Alliance, developing training materials and conducting the training. Sea Grant also provided some of the scientific research behind the implementation guidelines. Sea Grant will continue to guide the seafood HACCP implementation efforts through the Alliance for the next two years, as well as direct some of its research toward seafood safety.

A food safety-assurance program, the HACCP system is dramatically changing the seafood industry. The HACCP program has seven steps:

- Identifying potential hazards associated with a food;
- Identifying those points in a food's production, from its raw state through processing, shipping to consumption, where potential hazards can be controlled or eliminated;
- Establishing preventive measures with critical limits for each control point;
- Establishing a monitoring system of the control points;
- Establishing corrective actions to be taken when monitoring shows a critical limit has not been met;
- Establishing record-keeping to document the HACCP system application; and
- Establishing procedures to verify that the system is working consistently.

All seafood processors engaged in interstate commerce - companies that pack, process or hold seafood for shipment, including warehouse operations and distributors, and importers - must institute HACCP regulations by December 18. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the responsible state and local agencies, will begin checking for HACCP compliance after the December deadline. The Seafood HACCP Alliance, which will continue to receive funding through 1999 from the National Sea Grant College Program, will work with regulatory agencies and industry personnel to assess the implementation of HACCP procedures. Sea Grant will work to improve the process through that monitoring, making modifications and corrections to support the goal of product safety.

The National Seafood HACCP Alliance is continuing research and development projects to ensure the safety and quality of the nation's seafood. The Alliance and Sea Grant are focusing their efforts on development of better temperature monitoring and control procedures and devices at all steps of the processing procedure, from boat to consumer; improved packaging to insure longer safe shelf life of seafood products; developing more reliable and faster techniques of monitoring for problems such as bacterial contamination or spoilage; and developing new processing techniques.

HACCP was developed in the 1960s by an industry/government partnership in response to NASA's tough standards for foods used on space missions. Historically, end-product testing, with the product being destroyed, was used to evaluate product safety. However, with NASA specifying near 100 percent safety assurance, the end-testing approach was neither economical for manufacturers, nor reliable enough for the space program. To approach 100 percent reliability meant destroying so much product that only a tiny portion would be left for the mission. HACCP represents a rethinking of how best to achieve the desired results. Rather than inspecting the end-product, HACCP focuses on designing product safety through the continuum of ingredient specification, receiving, processing, distribution and use.

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