

The logo features a stylized graphic of a city skyline with three buildings of varying heights to the left of the text. The word "TORONTO" is in a large, bold, sans-serif font, and "STAFF REPORT" is in a smaller, bold, sans-serif font to its right. A horizontal line is positioned below the text.

TORONTO STAFF REPORT

February 17, 2002

To: Board of Health
From: Dr. Sheela V. Basrur, Medical Officer of Health
Subject: Food Irradiation

Purpose:

To provide information to the Board of Health on food irradiation.

Financial Implications:

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

Background:

On May 23, 2002 Councillor Pam McConnell received a communication from a constituent who was quite concerned about the irradiation of food. The constituent understood that Health Canada would be increasing the list of foods to be irradiated in Canada. Councillor McConnell, through the Chair of the Board of Health requested that Toronto Public Health prepare a report for the Board of Health on food irradiation. This report is in response to this request.

Comments:

Provisions currently exist in the Food and Drug Regulations for the use of the irradiation process on a limited number of foods. At the present time, food irradiation is permitted on potatoes and onions to inhibit sprouting during storage; on wheat and flour to control insect infestation during

storage; and on whole or ground spices and dehydrated seasoning preparations to reduce microbial load.

On November 23, 2002 Health Canada announced proposed new regulations to extend the use of food irradiation in Canada to include fresh and frozen ground beef, fresh and frozen poultry, and pre-packaged fresh, frozen, prepared and dried shrimp, prawns, and mangoes. The proposed new regulations are amendments to the Food and Drug Regulations (1094 – Food Irradiation), under the Food and Drugs Act. The deadline for comments is Friday February 21, 2003, which is 90 days after the November 23, 2002 publication of the proposed regulations in the Canada Gazette Part I.

Prior to pre-publication of these proposed amendments in the Canada Gazette, Part I, Health Canada conducted several consultations with the affected industries and other departments of the federal government. In particular, Health Canada consulted with the Canadian Produce Marketing Board, the Canadian Meat Council, the Canadian Poultry and Egg Processors Council, the Canadian Turkey Marketing Agency, the Fisheries Council of Canada, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). Health Canada has indicated that the comments from industry stakeholders and the CFIA were generally supportive of the proposal.

Scientists in Health Canada have concluded that:

- a) the consumption of the irradiated foods would not result in any risk to the health of the consumer;
- b) the irradiation of the foods would not result in destruction or loss of nutrients in a food recognized as a significant source of those nutrients in the diet; and
- c) the proposed uses of food irradiation could be beneficial through improved safety of the food products resulting from enhanced control of pathogens or reduction in insect infestation.

Nonetheless, there are many strong opinions both for and against the irradiation of food. There is continued concern about the safety of the technology and the wholesomeness of irradiated food.

Health Canada must balance these divergent opinions and pressures as this regulatory process proceeds, while ensuring an open and transparent process.

Toronto Public Health has circulated a technical report (Appendix 1) on food irradiation to staff and other interested parties for information and will post on the Toronto Public Health web site.

Conclusions:

Toronto Public Health will continue monitor developments and examine the public health implications of irradiated food.

Contact:

Ava Morgan
Public Health Nutritionist
Toronto Public Health
Health Promotion & Healthy Lifestyles
Planning & Policy
Tel: 416-338-8033
Fax: 416-392-0635
Email: amorgan@toronto.ca

Connie Uetrecht
Manager, Health Promotion & Healthy Lifestyles
Planning & Policy
Toronto Public Health
Tel: 416-338-7960
Fax: 416-392-0635
Email: cuetrech@toronto.on.ca

Fran Scott
Director of Planning and Policy
Toronto Public Health
Tel: 416-392-7463
Fax: 416-392-0713
Email: fscott@toronto.ca

Dr. Sheela V. Basrur
Medical Officer of Health

List of Attachments:

Appendix 1: Food Irradiation, A Technical Report Toronto Public Health, December 2002