

September 10, 2007

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The Interagency Working Group on Import Safety is pleased to submit this initial report, *Protecting American Consumers Every Step of the Way: A strategic framework for continual improvement in import safety*, in accordance with your Executive Order of July 18, 2007. The report outlines an approach that can build upon existing efforts to improve the safety of imported products, while facilitating trade.

Americans benefit from one of the safest food supplies and among the highest standards of consumer protection in the world. Our task is to build on this solid foundation by identifying actions for both the public and private sectors that will help our import safety system continually improve and adapt to a rapidly growing and changing global economy.

Approximately \$2 trillion of imported products entered the United States economy last year and experts project that this amount will triple by 2015. The federal government cannot and should not attempt to physically inspect every product entering the United States. Doing so would not only bring international trade to a standstill, but would also distract limited resources from those imported goods that pose the greatest risk. Instead, we have to be smarter about what we do.

While we acknowledge it is not possible to eliminate all risk with imported and domestic products, being smarter requires us to find new ways to protect American consumers and continually improve the safety of our imports. We recommend working with the importing community to develop approaches that consider risks over the life cycle of an imported product, and that focus actions and resources to minimize the likelihood of unsafe products reaching U.S. consumers.

This will require shifting from reliance on “snapshots” at the border to interdict unsafe products, to a cost-effective, prevention-focused “video” model that identifies and targets those critical points in the import life cycle where the risk of unsafe products is greatest and verifies the safety of products at those important phases. Such a risk-based, prevention-focused model will help ensure that safety is built into products before they reach our borders.

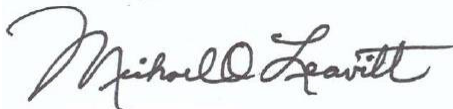
Import safety is a public-private responsibility and some agencies and private parties are leading the way towards a more preventative system. There are important roles for the private sector, foreign governments, the U.S. government, and state and local governments. As with domestic products, recognizing best practices and incentives within the private sector and building consensus among the public and private sector are cost-effective and proven ways to minimize risks.

Supporting this model are six building blocks: 1) Advance a common vision, 2) Increase accountability, enforcement and deterrence, 3) Focus on risks over the life cycle of an imported product, 4) Build interoperable systems, 5) Foster a culture of collaboration, and 6) Promote technological innovation and new science.

Over the coming weeks, we plan to solicit extensive comments and recommendations from the public, and we will provide to you a follow-on Action Plan by mid-November. The Action Plan will be based on this Strategic Framework and will lay out a road map with short- and long-term recommendations for improving import safety.

On behalf of all members on the Interagency Working Group on Import Safety, I thank you for this opportunity to serve our great country.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael O. Leavitt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael O. Leavitt
Secretary, Health and Human Services and
Chair, Interagency Working Group on Import Safety