



## *Quality Food Analysis, Consultation & Training Services, LLC*

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### November 2007: Food Allergens

Did you know that there are over 160 foods that are identified to cause an allergic reaction in almost twelve million Americans? Of these 160 foods, 90% of the reaction is seen in the top eight ingredients: milk, egg, fish (e.g., bass, flounder, cod), crustacean shellfish (e.g., crab, lobster, shrimp), and tree nuts (e.g., almonds, pecans, walnuts.)

An allergic reaction to food occurs when the body's immune system mistakenly responds to a food as being harmful. Once the body identifies a specific food as harmful, when the person eats that food, the immune system releases chemicals such as histamine to protect the body. These chemicals cause the allergic symptoms that can occur within minutes to two hours and includes problems with respiratory, gastrointestinal, or cardiovascular systems. In some cases, the reaction is so severe that it causes anaphylaxis and even death. Each year in the US, food allergies cause approximately 30,000 emergency office visits and is believed to be the leading cause of anaphylaxis.

On January 1, 2006, the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act (FALCPA) required that any food containing the top eight food allergens be labeled in plain language, in order for people with food allergies to choose foods that will not pose a health risk. Plain language means for instance, if casein is used as an ingredient, the label be marked "milk product," or "egg product" if albumin is used. Casein is often seen in non-dairy products. The definition for "non-dairy" will not change, but facilities using casein or products claiming to be "non-dairy" should check the ingredients and make sure the label mentions "milk product" or "milk derivative."

The eight allergens also must be listed even if in very small amounts, including coloring, flavoring, or spice blends. Furthermore, you must list the specific type of nuts, fish, and/or crustacean found in the product (e.g., almond, cashew, tuna, shrimp, or lobster.)

The label must be either where:

1. The word "Contains" followed by the name of the major food allergen (milk, wheat, or eggs for example); or
2. A parenthetical statement in the list of ingredients, e.g., "albumin (egg)".

This regulation is required for all food facilities overseen by the FDA and are pre-packaging their food items, including imported foods. The regulation is also required at retail facilities in any state where the Federal Food Code is adopted as State law. For example, California adopted the Federal Food Code this year and now all restaurants and markets in California that prepackage their food items must place an allergen label on their products.

Five minutes a day of staff training would make all the difference. Why don't you try various methods to incorporate training into your work day? If you have any questions regarding sanitation or food safety, or require additional information regarding staff training, please feel free to e-mail us.