

Food Safety Alert – 1/30/07

I reported yesterday that evidence suggested an 83 year-old woman from Richland, Washington had died from eating E. coli contaminated spinach last September. The *Monterey County Herald* is saying that it is unlikely that she will be listed as the fourth fatality. According to the article, Washington Department of Health spokesman Jeff Smith said the agency received no report that she died as a result of poisoning from E. coli. All questions were referred to the CDC by the FDA. "CDC spokeswoman Lola Russell said Monday the agency has not changed its count since October, when three people had died and 199 people were infected in 26 states." Her attorney, William Marler, said "'its DNA fingerprint matches all the others in the outbreak and that in bags of spinach. Whether they list it as the cause of death, it's unlikely, given the time frame between the outbreak and her death and given she was 83.'"

A death in Maryland is still under investigation.

<http://www.montereyherald.com/mld/montereyherald/news/nation/16578294.htm>

The *Salinas Californian* has reported on the death as well. "It really goes to the human tragedy of the outbreak,' said Joseph Pezzini, vice president of operations for Ocean Mist Farms and chairman of the Grower-Shipper Association of the Central Coast. Ocean Mist has not been implicated in any E. coli outbreaks." The coroner's report listed the cause of death as heart failure. She had spent five months in the hospital. Jim Bogart, president of the Grower Shipper Association, called the death "tragic and disappointing." Bogart believes it keeps attention on the outbreak. "Like Pezzini, he said it also highlights the importance of the marketing agreement, which could lead to an industry-wide marketing order that mandates food safety systems."

In the Maryland death, state Department of Health officials lost culture samples making it hard for them to confirm the cause of her illness. She has not officially been listed in the death toll. She died on September 13, 2006.

The FDA has not yet released its findings on the source of the outbreak tied to spinach last September. "Michael Herndon, an FDA spokesman, said the agency's final report on the outbreak may come out in February. Herndon, however, said it could be delayed because the team working on the report is also investigating December E. coli outbreaks at Taco Bell restaurants on the East Coast and Taco John's restaurants in the Midwest."

<http://www.thecalifornian.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070130/NEWS01/701300315>

William Marler has posted a brief excerpt from the Tri-City Herald that mirrors what the local papers are saying on his blog site. After the excerpt, it goes into a in-depth scientific look at the relationship between E. coli contamination, the elderly, and premature death. Rather than recap it, I request that you give it a read.

<http://www.ecoliblog.com/2007/01/articles/-e-coli-watch/the-e-coli-o157h7-bacteria-and-the-significance-of-age/>

Here is the link to the Tri-City Herald article:

<http://www.tri-cityherald.com/tch/local/state/story/8599837p-8492695c.html>