

Food Safety Alert – 12/21/06

According to the *Monterey County Herald*, the Johnson Canyon landfill east of Gonzales must do an EIR if it wishes to expand. The Salinas Valley Solid Waste Authority wants county permission to expand by 16.3 acres. The agency also wishes to increase the height of the landfill anywhere between 40 and 100 feet. Planning commissioners in the county say that means the landfill will rise above hundreds of acres of row crops, thus the need for the EIR. "Brian Finegan, an attorney for the produce company D'Arrigo Brothers Co. that grows lettuce near the Johnson Canyon landfill, said the last thing growers would need amid the high-profile crisis is "a 100-foot pile of garbage" next to their fields." Finegan is urging the commissioners to require new environmental assessments based upon new crop safety issues. The current capacity of the landfill should last until 2014. The new expansion should cover it indefinitely, depending on how well the authority can continue efforts to reduce landfill waste. Commissioner Jay Brown believes the national media would have a field day with pictures of crops next to the landfill. The authority had been seeking a landfill near San Lucas in Long Valley before it ran into incredible public opposition.

<http://www.montereyherald.com/mld/montereyherald/news/16288881.htm>

The Salinas Californian has also reported on this issue. Here is the link:

<http://www.californianonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20061221/NEWS01/612210331>

In an article by FoodConsumer.Org online, the New Jersey Department of Health and Human Services (NJDHSS) reports that 86 cases related to the recent outbreak of E. coli at Taco Bell restaurants are under continued investigation. Of those, there are 33 cases that meet the CDC definition associated with the outbreak. 25 cases are confirmed and 8 are probable. 37 of the 86 under investigation occurred in New Jersey. "The Department has been sharing its data with the CDC, in addition to conducting its own data analysis. The Department's analysis has demonstrated that some food ingredients, including lettuce, cheese, and ground beef, were consumed more often among the ill persons than well persons; these findings are consistent with CDC's findings based on combined data from all states with cases associated with this outbreak... Evaluation of all the data suggests that shredded lettuce consumed at Taco Bell restaurants in the northeastern United States was the likely source of the outbreak."

http://foodconsumer.org/7777/8888/Recalls_and_Alerts_3/121908062006_New_Jersey_updates_E_coli_investigation.shtml

Taco John's restaurant has been hit with another lawsuit, according to an article by the Associated Press. It is the second case filed against Taco John's. The lawsuit, filed in Cedar Rapids, accuses the restaurant of negligence. As many as 76 people were sickened by eating at the chain. What makes this case interesting is that it occurred at a city yet unnamed in the outbreak – Waterloo, Iowa. Karen Hibben-Levi checked into a local hospital and remained in care for six days. She tested positive for E. coli contamination. Taco John's spokesman Brian Dixon said the company has contacted the county's health department to determine if it is related or if she even ate at a Taco John's restaurant. Black Hawk County Health Department has said that people have become ill from E. coli that were not related to the location in Iowa. Taco John's has severed ties with the distributor that supplies more than 100 franchises in the northern plains states. Bill Marler is convinced that the problem is at the farm level, not the distribution level. He said health officials believe the lettuce was tainted in fields located either in California or Arizona.

http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/6420AP_IATacoJohnsLawsuit.html