



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 21 September 2012

13961/12

**AGRI 601
SAN 202**

NOTE

from:	Czech delegation
to:	Council
Subject:	Current situation concerning methanol intoxication in the Czech Republic - Information from the Czech delegation

Delegations will find attached a note from the Czech delegation on the abovementioned subject, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) on 24-25 September 2012.

Current situation concerning methanol intoxication in the Czech Republic - information of the Czech Republic

Since Thursday, September 6th, 2012, cases of methanol intoxication have appeared in the Czech Republic from methyl alcohol contained in spirits. The first cases of methanol poisoning were confirmed in the northeastern regions of the Czech Republic (Moravia-Silesian region) and subsequently in several other regions and in Prague.

According to available information, no contaminated spirits were distributed to any other EU Member States or other countries.

Until further notice, there is currently in place an extraordinary measure stating that the placing on the market, including the offer for sale and sale and distribution to the final consumer and the export to the European Union and third countries of all alcoholic beverages with an ethanol content of 20 % vol. or more is prohibited.

As of September 20th, there has been official confirmation of 23 lethal cases and 34 people have been hospitalized.

A thorough investigation of the incident by the Police of the Czech Republic has been ongoing.

Activities of competent authorities of the Czech Republic to protect public health in the Czech Republic and other EU Member States

1. Market inspections

In reaction to the initial cases, exceptional inspections were declared aimed at inspecting alcoholic beverages. All relevant authorities and agencies were involved in the inspections: public health protection bodies (Ministry of Health; sale in public dining facilities), Czech Agriculture and Food Inspection Authority (Ministry of Agriculture, manufacturing, retail), Czech Trade Inspection (Ministry of Industry and Trade), customs officials, Police of the Czech Republic, and Fire Rescue Service of the Czech Republic. In the event of any suspicions or failure to cooperate by food business operator, the cases are being passed on to the Police of the Czech Republic or the Customs Administration for further investigation. At the present time, these agencies have carried out **tens of thousands** of inspections.

2. Measures taken to protect public health in the Czech Republic

On September 11th, the Ministry of Health warned the public against the consumption of alcoholic beverages of unclear or unproven origins, and then on September 12th issued extraordinary measure concerning the sale of alcoholic beverages. This measure prohibited the operators of stalls, food stands, mobile stands and other mobile or temporary vending operations from dispensing and selling spirits containing more than 30 percent alcohol by volume, until the repeal of such exceptional measure.

On September 12th, the situation was discussed by the Czech government. At this meeting an **Inter-departmental Emergency Committee** was established to regularly meet and address the issue of methyl alcohol intoxication with the participation of all relevant ministries (of Health, of Agriculture, of Industry and Trade, of the Interior) and other subjects (Police of the Czech Republic and Customs Administration), and handle the current situation. Information from the Committee is communicated directly following their meetings.

In conjunction with the growing number of cases of methyl alcohol poisoning Minister of Health issued on September 14th the new extraordinary measure applying to all food business operators, including persons operating dining services, prohibiting the offer for sale, sale and other manners of consumption of spirits containing more than 20% ethanol by volume, until repeal of this extraordinary measure.

At a meeting of the Czech Government on September 19th, a discussion took place on the steps and measures necessary to restore the market.

On September 20th, after due consultation with the Commission and another meeting of the Czech Government, Minister of Health extended the extraordinary measure by prohibiting the export to the European Union and third countries of all alcoholic beverages with an ethanol content of 20 % or more. The measure entered into force immediately by declaration in the public media.

3. Public transparency

All information is immediately disclosed publicly:

- Through a briefing on TV directly following meetings of the **Inter-departmental Emergency Committee**.
- The Ministry of Health posts current information on its website at www.mzcr.cz.
- The recommendations of the Toxicological Information Centre were released for both the public and physicians and an info-line was set up.
- Info-lines were set up for consumers by Regional Public Health Authorities and the National Institute of Public Health, which also offers free testing of alcohol samples for methanol content.
- The Ministry of Agriculture informs consumers through its website at www.bezpecnostpotravin.cz and press releases of the Czech Agriculture and Food Inspection Authority

Individual regions have also set up their own info-lines for consumers.

4. Communication with the EU and WHO agencies

On September 8th, the Czech Republic sent original notification by Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) about the methanol poisonings caused by the consumption of hard alcohol in poured spirits – tuzemák and vodka (RASFF Notification 12-648). On September 15th, the Ministry of Health inserted additional information (12-684-add01) regarding the case of methanol in poured spirits of unknown origin, in which it declared the second exceptional measure taken by the Ministry of Health.

On September 17th, the notification was updated to publish the label of the bottle in which contaminated alcohol was found (12-684-add02). The RASFF notification is continually updated.

On September 20th, the notification was updated according to national ban on export of alcohol from the Czech Republic.

On September 11th, the INFOSAN network (WHO) was notified of the situation in the Czech Republic through the Emergency Contact Point. This information was updated on September 14th, following the announcement of the extraordinary measure banning the offer and sale of alcohol over 20% by volume in the Czech Republic. Additional updates of the information were made on September 17th and September 20th.

On September 12th, information regarding the situation in the Czech Republic was submitted to the European Commission at a meeting of SCFCAH for toxicological safety.

On September 14th and 17th the matter was in depth discussed at the extraordinary audio-conferences of the Committee of the Health Safety, where the Czech Republic conveyed thorough description of the situation.

On September 21st, updated information on the developing situation in the Czech Republic was presented at the SCFCAH for biological safety meeting.

Also, the European Commission (DG SANCO) is being regularly informed on the daily basis about the latest developments of the situation.
