



The **Anaphylaxis** campaign  
Helping people with severe allergies live their lives

## **Lack of training is one of the key causes of allergy alerts**

Allergy incidents investigated by the Food Standards Agency during 2008 were caused mainly by inadequate training, packaging errors and incorrect use of ingredients.

Facts and figures are provided in the Agency's annual report on food-related incidents. The report notes that 149 food alerts were issued during 2008 including 59 allergy alerts.

Comparing last year's figures with those of 2007, the report highlights a rise in allergy alerts relating to cereals, soya, tree nuts and celery.

However, the picture is different in respect of milk. While milk remained a major cause of allergen alerts, 2008 saw a 32 per cent decline in the number of incidents in this category compared to 2007. This was believed to be the result of the Agency's campaign focusing on plain (dark) chocolate.

Towards the end of 2007 the Agency received notification of a number of incidents relating to cross contamination of plain chocolate with milk proteins. Plain chocolate products are often made on equipment that is also used to produce milk chocolate. Effective clean down between production runs is difficult because water cannot be introduced into such environments, as it affects the quality of the chocolate.

The Agency collected information from milk allergic consumers via the Anaphylaxis Campaign, indicating that many people with milk allergy do eat plain chocolate on the assumption that it is safe for them. The Agency held a meeting with a range of stakeholders, including bulk chocolate producers, businesses making chocolate products and retailers. Subsequently businesses reassessed their practices and labelling, including the use of 'may contain milk' statements, and the trade associations produced general industry guidance on this issue to bring about a consistent approach.

Despite the reduction in milk allergy incidents in 2008, the overall picture has shown only a small improvement this year. Since January, the Anaphylaxis Campaign has dealt with 23 allergy alerts. If this rate were to continue, the 2009 total would be around 53. Clearly there is still a need for improved systems of allergen management within industry.

See the Agency's full report at: <http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/incidents08.pdf>