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Agriprocessors safety problems

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Agriprocessors Inc. has a history of noncompliance with state and federal regulations related to food safety, pollution and workplace safety at its Postville facility, government records show. Here are some actions government regulators have taken in the past 2 years:

FEBRUARY 2006: U.S. Department of Labor fines the company \$2,000 for a serious workplace-safety violation. The fine is later reduced to \$1,000. Two weeks later, the plant is fined \$2,500 for a serious worker-safety violation involving machinery. That fine is later reduced to \$1,250.

MARCH 2006: Agriprocessors is cited for worker-safety violations related to respiratory protection. No fine is imposed.

AUGUST 2006: The company agrees to pay \$603,086 to settle a complaint by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Federal prosecutors had accused the owners of discharging pollutants into Postville's city water treatment system.

SEPTEMBER 2006: The U.S. Department of Agriculture issues a "letter of warning" to the plant, based on failure to meet minimum requirements for sanitary conditions. Rodents had been seen in offices, and other unsanitary conditions were noted outside the plant. The letter noted multiple instances of unsanitary conditions that had gone uncorrected over the previous 90 days.

DECEMBER 2006: USDA inspectors find fecal contamination of chickens being processed. In one case, an inspector has to intervene three times to correct the problem. A day later, an inspector finds that about half the chickens he observes being processed are contaminated with feces and bile. A week later, inspectors note that at least 70 percent of the chickens are contaminated with feces. Two days later, inspectors report finding two pallets of beef that had "a rancid smell and (were) slimy to the touch." Hydraulic oil is seen dripping from an overhead motor onto raw chickens being processed. A few days later, inspectors see the same problem.

JANUARY 2007: USDA inspectors find "a large amount of fecal and bile contamination" on chickens being processed. Three areas are deemed "out of compliance, with fecal material sprayed everywhere around them." An inspector halts the meat-processing line and raises the issue with a worker who wanted to restart the line without taking corrective action.

JANUARY 2007: The USDA announces that Agriprocessors is recalling 2,700 pounds of frankfurters because of possible underprocessing.

JULY 2007: The USDA announces that Agriprocessors is recalling 35,860 pounds of frozen beef and chicken products because they may contain egg albumen, a known allergen, which is not declared on the label.

MARCH 2008: The Iowa Division of Labor Services cites Agriprocessors for 39 violations of workplace safety rules and proposes a \$182,000 fine. The sanctions are based on inspections that took place in October 2007 and February 2008. Inspectors say the violations relate to

hazardous chemicals and inadequate emergency response plans. Federal officials put the case "on hold," according to Kerry Koonce of Iowa Workforce Development. As of Tuesday, the matter remained unresolved.
