Summary
The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) uses a science-based risk analysis approach to manage radiological contamination events in roughly the same manner as is used for other types of contamination. On a case-by-case basis, risk is assessed and issues are managed in a way that involves all pertinent stakeholders.

FDA has 5 Regional Radiological Health Representatives across the U.S. who function as the Agency’s field expert liaisons. One or more of them would be on-site on the Advisory Team, should one form. Food analysis for radionuclides occurs at a full-capability facility in Winchester, MA. Emergency response operations are coordinated through the Agency’s Emergency Operations Center, which operates within the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

FDA has published Guidance that provides a conceptual approach for protecting the public from radioactive contamination in food and also gives benchmark values called derived intervention levels (DILs) for several radionuclides. These levels are used to determine whether radionuclide activity levels are below concern or further investigation is warranted. Other guidelines, analogous to the DILs, have been generated by the DOE-led Operational Guidelines Task Group and the FRMAC assessment scientists are capable of performing the necessary calculations if other values are needed.

FDA’s DILs are based on conservative assumptions and default values for certain parameters in place of data. There may be circumstances in which responsible risk management might call for the use of different intervention levels. As an example, this could happen if there is a wide-spread contamination event affecting a large amount of the food supply, with the prospect of significant food shortages. In such a case, the specific circumstances of that event and scientific data would be used to determine situation-specific guideline levels for protection of public health.

FDA is active nationally and internationally to strive for consistency in emergency response planning. Discussions are under way regarding the revision of existing guidance and/or the development of new guidance. In the meantime, the current guidance remains in effect.