

S. Joe Bhatia President and CEO American National Standards Institute	Bolstering Consumer Confidence Opening Remarks – Day Two December 3, 2008
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Word count: 951 - *approximately 7.6 minutes*

Good morning . . . my name is Joe Bhatia, and I am president and CEO of the American National Standards Institute, ANSI.

On behalf of our co-sponsors . . . the Grocery Manufacturers Association . . . the National Fisheries Institute . . . and the Seafood Products Association . . . I am pleased to welcome you back for Day Two of *Bolstering Consumer Confidence*.

For those of you who may not be familiar with ANSI, the Institute was founded 90 years ago by five professional societies and three federal agencies. These groups came together because they saw the need for an organization that could take on the difficult issues that fell in the grey area between regulatory mandates and private sector initiatives.

Thus, from its very inception, ANSI has been in the business of bringing the private and public sectors together to address and help resolve the critical issues that face this nation . . . and the global economy.

(pause)

ANSI knows from experience that solutions that come about through a thoughtful, open and consensus-based process are the solutions that work best.

That is why I am very pleased that today's agenda focuses on gathering your input on the identification of third-party audit criteria that will help us develop a regime of essential safe practices for the food industry.

The outcomes of this meeting will enable U.S. regulators to more appropriately manage the issue of third party audits for the food industry when dealing with U.S. trading partners and the WTO.

(pause)

Clearly, there is a strong foundation upon which to build.

The food industry is already one of the most highly regulated industries in domestic and global markets.

And new steps are being taken every day.

For example . . . yesterday, Dr. David Acheson provided a summary of the FDA's new "Food Protection Plan" which lays out an impressive agenda for the future.

I say "impressive" because FDA developed the plan by casting a wide net to gather input. They have concentrated on making better use of the private AND public sector resources that can make a difference in the fight to keep our food safe.

Public programs . . . food industry initiatives . . . as well as expert, neutral, "third-party" efforts have been – and must continue to be – part of the mix.

We all need to work together in a collaborative way in order to meet the challenges that the FDA – and others – have delineated.

(pause)

In fact, *collaboration* is the premise for today's agenda . . .

A mark-up of CODEX' *General Principles of Food Hygiene* has been drafted for our discussion.

As this audience knows and appreciates, CODEX (*Codex Alimentarius International*) has been working for more than 45 years to coordinate all the food standards work that has been done by international governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Their principles document is intended to provide a benchmark that can be used by any federal authority for the evaluation of a voluntarily submitted third-party audit representing any food product . . . imported or domestic.

(pause)

The food industry is not working in isolation.

I think we all recognize that concerns about imports and product safety are growing in all sectors.

Toy safety, for example, was a major theme that arose early last year. This was one of the major topics addressed at the ANSI-hosted “Building Consumer Confidence” conference in September 2007.

The Import Safety Summit held on July 9 looked at a broader range of global supply chain issues.

This week’s event, of course, focuses in again on a more narrow scope of work.

(pause)

The passage this summer of the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act . . . more commonly known as the Toy Safety Bill . . . is a testament that progress is being made.

This legislation recognizes the value of private sector initiatives to address issues of public concern regarding the safety of children’s and other consumer products.

Speaking from ANSI’s perspective, we believe the underpinnings of progress are standards and the related conformance procedures . . . and that includes accredited third-party certification and auditing . . . that are developed and agreed through the active participation of industry, government and consumers.

Commonly accepted standards and conformity assessment practices will lead to a greater harmonization of regulatory policies worldwide. And this, in turn, will help to facilitate trade while assuring a more consistent level of consumer protection.

(pause)

Our objective is clear. So let us get started with today’s program . . .

First we will have a panel that will explore how to improve food safety for consumers through the establishment and harmonization of a global food safety system.

Mike Robach of Cargill, Inc., will be our moderator for this session. He will join us in just a moment to introduce his panel.

Following the panel session, we'll break into smaller groups for concurrent breakout discussions of the same topic that the panel will introduce.

Each group will address the same set of four questions¹. We'll then come back together at the end of the day and our session moderators will present summary findings from each of the groups.

We look forward to hearing your input . . . and your identification of common issues and recommendations.

We'll then lay out an action plan for next steps . . . which is our deliverable for this event . . . and is a great way to end the conference.

(pause)

With that, I'll wish you a productive day, and turn the podium over to Mike who will get us started with our opening Panel.

Mike

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- ¹ - What criteria should be included in a publicly available, science-based set of audit standards?
- How should FDA recognize and harness existing private sector firms to ensure meeting the demand for third party audits and facility certification on a global basis?
 - How can the government and industry harmonize requirements to avoid redundant assessments?
 - If auditors are certified by an internationally recognized certification body, and registered with FDA, how can any conflict of interest be avoided?