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## Label law delay angers activists

### Impatience grows over progress of life-or-death issue

May 03, 2007

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Canadians who suffer from food allergies continue to wait for common-sense food-labelling laws that should have been on the books at least a year ago.

Health Canada's amendments to labelling regulations were made two years ago. All that's needed before they are put into effect is final comments from interested parties.

"Some delays have been experienced ... due to the complexity of the file and a heavy food-regulatory agenda," says Health Canada spokesperson Paul Duchesne. He adds that the proposed amendments should be published later this year in the *Canada Gazette* (the official federal government newspaper), "to seek input from all."

Anaphylaxis Canada executive director Laurie Harada wants a firm commitment as to when the regulations will take effect.

"Specify a date," she says. "We were told it would be June 2006, and then we were told `soon.' When is soon? This is a health and safety issue for a growing number of people with food allergies and it's important that some of these gaps are closed."

Ottawa allergist Dr. Chuck Frankish, president of the Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, says his group is becoming impatient because this is a matter of life or death.

"Their lives are on the line when foods aren't clearly labelled," he says.

Frankish was one of six representatives from various allergy-related organizations who recently met with a representative from the office of Tony Clement, the federal health minister. They were told the matter would be looked into and someone would get back to them, Frankish says.

As a result of the new regulations, the list of ingredients will have to include common names. Any ingredient that is an allergen – such as peanuts, tree nuts, sesame, milk, eggs, fish, crustaceans, shellfish, soy, wheat, spelt, Kamut, oats, barley and rye – will have to be listed as such. Imported foods also must list any allergens. Also, any allergen that is part of an ingredient must be clearly listed.

"What happens now is you can buy potato chips, and it will list potatoes and then seasonings," says Frankish. "It won't mention anything about milk products." However, the seasonings may contain traces of milk, and eating these chips could cause a serious or even fatal reaction for someone allergic to milk. That's what happened to 9-year-old Jaimie Nackan of Thornhill when at age 3 she tried some soy cheese. While the word "milk" wasn't listed, one of the ingredients was casein (a protein found in milk). "I knew casein but somehow it didn't register, and she reacted within minutes," says her mother, Lisa.

It's equally frustrating for Marion Zarkadas of Ottawa, who's on the advisory board of the Canadian Celiac Association. In 1993, while working for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, she was asked to head a committee to develop a list of priority allergens that eventually led to the legislation in 2000.

"In 2000, we were ahead of everybody," she says. "Since that time, Australia, the U.S. and Europe have their legislation in place and we're just sitting here."