

DHS Student & Alumni spotlight

Are you going to eat that?! Safety precautions of global food suppliers questioned by NCFPD student Swati Agiwal



Agiwal

Do you know much about what you are eating and where it's been? The people serving it to you may not know, either.

The intricacies in getting food to our shores and our tables safely concerns Swati Agiwal, a University of Minnesota student researcher studying supply chain security.

She notes that an expanded supply chain that brings us foods from all parts of the globe at any time of the year has limited food providers' awareness of where ingredients and products are from.

"Today most products have components that are sourced from various parts of the world and the final product itself travels several thousand miles before it reaches its ultimate destination," says Agiwal, a member of the DHS National Center for Food Protection and Defense (NCFPD) also working with the Center for Risk and the Economic Assessment of Terrorist Events (CREATE).

Agiwal's looks at food companies' protection of their own food supply chains from intentional and accidental contamination and their ability to recover from a contamination event.

Nearly 50% of all U.S. businesses close after a catastrophic event - a figure proven true countless times in the food sector.

The size of a company, its scope of operations and the actual impact of its investment in security are all factors, says Agiwal.

Economic incentives can be a big factor when the cost of protection outweighs the cost of the perceived risk.

It can take money to achieve greater security. Even those companies who seem most able to foot the bill, however, may be becoming so large that they raise their exposure to calamity.

Interim results reflect this, with large domestic firms showing the best efforts toward resiliency preparedness and large global firms ranking last behind small global and small domestic companies, respectively.

"There is substantial empirical evidence that superior preparedness and planning can significantly reduce the losses from a disruption," says Agiwal, noting, however, that the growing expansiveness of supply chains means that managers must look into not just increasing security measures but also awareness.

"A more proactive security culture can ultimately make firms and supply chains more resilient," she says.

Another factor that enables greater resiliency is putting security plans into action versus leaving them on the shelf, and to what extent a plan is being implemented.

Agiwal's work has exposed additional factors that include the capabilities to detect a security breakdown, responsiveness to an event, recovery capabilities and the human role in protection.

Agiwal urges the need for enhanced security regulations. "The conclusions from my empirical work have important policy implications in what needs to be done further to achieve a resilient supply chain," says Agiwal.

Agiwal will graduate in (2008) with a Ph.D. degree in Applied Economics.

This article is an excerpt from the U.S. Department of Security Student & Alumni Newsletter.

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