When things go wrong with the food supply, consumers are sometimes the last to know but the first to pay, especially when illnesses occur. It is a well-known reality in the food industry that recalls are often announced late on Friday afternoon. Distributors and retailers all over the country have to work quickly to remove the recalled products from their shelves in order to prevent illnesses. But once contaminated products have been sold, it can be very challenging to recover the products. Consumers must first hear about a recall and then take action in their homes to either discard or return the products. An unsuspecting consumer who doesn’t get the news may end up sick.

Thirteen months ago, the U.S. House of Representatives passed food safety legislation that could make recalls less frequent and outbreaks less dangerous. Since that bill was passed – and while we wait for Senate action on companion legislation – our organizations, the Center for Science in the Public Interest, the Consumer Federation of America and U.S. PIRG, have documented 85 separate recalls of FDA regulated food.

I mentioned that the food safety legislation approved by the House and the bill currently before the Senate should make recalls less frequent and outbreaks less dangerous. Let me tell you why.

This food safety legislation will mandate preventive control systems for food manufacturers. This should help to prevent contamination from occurring and provide for earlier discovery of problems before the foods get into the chains of distribution.

This legislation will mandate much more frequent inspections of food facilities. Last week, we heard of some gruesome conditions in the egg houses involved in the recent recall of half a billion eggs. More frequent inspections are essential to avoid these types of unsafe conditions.

This legislation will allow FDA to require recalls if companies don’t comply and provide for traceback systems that should speed discovery and removal of contaminated food stuffs.

There are many other important provisions, but let’s start the questions.