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Customs / Trade

FDA grace period for bioterror food rules

Updated 11:20 a.m. ET, Fri Oct 10, 2003

By R.G. Edmonson


The JOURNAL of COMMERCE ONLINE


WASHINGTON — Food importers will be getting a four-month grace period before the Food and Drug Administration begins enforcement of [new reporting rules](#) under the Bioterrorism Act of 2002, officials said Thursday.

The rules, which require importers to provide FDA data on food shipments before they arrive at a U.S. port, will go into effect on Dec.

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12. Rules requiring [registration of foreign food processing facilities](#) will take effect the same date.

"We have decided that for the four months after Dec. 12 that rather than doing normal enforcement, we will focus on education and training. Then we'll begin to phase in our enforcement efforts," said Bob Lake, director of regulations and policy for the Center for Food Safety and Nutrition.

The agency also will conduct education programs for the trade before Dec. 12. Lake said that the agency will publish compliance guidelines in the Federal Register sometime before Dec. 12. There will be a comment period after the guidelines are published.

Officials said that the FDA advance reporting requirements, which will rely heavily on the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection's computerized entry system, will be transferred to the new Automated Commercial Environment, but they did not have a timetable for the changeover.

FDA inspectors also will be able to use Customs' national targeting system in a Washington suburb to help them identify high-risk food shipments.

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