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Survey Finds JanSan Industry May Be Underestimating Impact Of Avian Flu

Manufacturing.Net - July 25, 2006

Although many Janitorial-Sanitation professionals are aware of the possibility of an avian flu pandemic, some may be underestimating its impact on their lives and businesses, according to a survey of industry manufacturers, distributors, and facility service providers.

The survey, conducted by Enviro-Solutions, found that 46 percent of respondents indicate they have a "clear" understanding of the avian flu issue, while 36 percent say they are "somewhat" aware of the flu or know little about it.

Approximately 58 percent report that their customers or clients consider an outbreak of avian flu "a serious threat;" and 82 percent believe that if there is an outbreak, it will pose a serious danger to the United States and Canada.

More than 70 percent believe there are ways to prevent an avian flu outbreak or help minimize the impact of a pandemic should it occur; and nearly 90 percent believe that "the JanSan industry will play a role in minimizing the consequences" of an outbreak.

"These figures are much higher than what would probably have been reported a few months ago," says Mike Sawchuk, vice president and general manager of Enviro-Solutions. "However, I question whether our industry really comprehends how much a pandemic will affect our lives."

Sawchuk is concerned that 54 percent of the respondents believe an avian flu pandemic will not have a negative effect on the JanSan industry.

"This may be wishful thinking," says Sawchuk. "If a pandemic occurs, many experts believe schools, offices, stores, and even medical centers may close intermittently and for extended periods of time. Of course this will impact our lives and our industry."

Sawchuk believes JanSan industry leaders and trade associations should actively help the industry understand the avian flu problem and how to deal with it should it become serious.

"Unlike SARS, which struck by surprise a few years ago, at least we have some warning," says Sawchuk. "We can use this time to prepare for the worst, even if it does not happen."

In 2005, avian flu strains infected people in Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Thailand. About 60 people have died, and strains are being detected in animals for the first time in Romania, Greece, Turkey, Russia, and England, according to the Avian Flu Information Site.

The New York Times reported on July 21, 2006, that Indonesia has now surpassed Vietnam as the country hardest hit by avian flu. Between January and March 2006, more than a million birds have been killed in Indonesia. Forty-two people have died in Indonesia since the presence of the avian flu was confirmed a year ago.

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