

Excerpts from Transcribed Interview with Dr. Henry Walke

**Industry-USDA Collaboration Weakened CDC and OSHA Guidance and Recommendations for Coronavirus Mitigation in Meatpacking Plants**

Q: And did the changes that ultimately made it into the April 22nd memo do that? Did they keep workers safe, and did they align with the best science at the time?

A: We don't like to put these types of waffle words into our guidance, if feasible, for example. I think it undermines the clarity of the guidance itself. These are the recommendations. And so I was resistant to try to incorporate this type of language into our guidance, **because it really muddies the guidance, when we start putting these waffle words into it. So I felt that was watering down our guidance.**

Q: You mentioned that you don't like including those types of words in guidance, generally. Why don't you or CDC like to do that?

A: Well, I think it -- you know, we try to be as clear and direct as possible with our recommendations. And I think that if we include phrases like that, if feasible, **then it dilutes our recommendations.**

And so I think we try to -- when we put out guidance, to have a more firm recommendation, do this, not that. We recommend X. **And so the qualifiers really, I think, dilute our message.** So in the editing and clearance process, we try to either strike that kind of language or think, well, do we even need to -- this recommendation is going to be so watered down, should we include it or not. So that's an internal debate that we have. And we try to be as direct and clear as possible.

Q: You mentioned the possible harm from diluting or watering down guidance. What is that harm, or how would it manifest?

A: Well, I mean, **it could manifest by undermining the whole recommendation.** So basically, **people could opt out of our guidance,** because it wasn't feasible. So I think that's the harm, that we provide such a -- **it's so wishy washy that -- is it guidance at some point? And is it a CDC recommendation or not?** So we try not to put out this type of guidance, or these types of qualifiers.

Q: You mentioned that you were resistant to incorporate that type of qualifying language. In what ways were you resistant? Did you voice that to someone?

A: **Dr. Redfield and I had many conversations around these -- very frank, open conversations. And in the end, he's the director, and he wanted to include this language. And so that's what we did.** But we would have open discussion. I would -- we would bring in -- he would listen to a group of us. We would go back and forth around what we felt was the right way forward, **and he had the ultimate decision.**

Q: Do you know more specifically why Dr. Redfield wanted to include that language? I know we mentioned some concerns from USDA and industry. But more specifically, how this language made it into the memo?

A: I don't. I couldn't speculate, really. **I remember Dr. Redfield wanting this language, if feasible, in the memo. And having the discussion around this, and thinking that, okay, but this is diluting the message.** You know, I told you we had concerns around the conversation with USDA and industry, but that's really all I remember.

Q: Sure. Do you know if the request came from industry?

A: What I remember, and I want to be careful, because **what I remember is the conversation around trying to make sure our guidance was as flexible as possible**, or was flexible for these older facilities. And so that's what I remember in the discussions.

Q: And in any of your discussions with Dr. Redfield, did you explicitly raise your concerns with that language?

A: **I did.** But, you know, this is one of many conversations Dr. Redfield and I had during this period of time. **But, yes, I remember expressing my concern about diluting the message.**

Q: And what was his response to that?

A: I don't remember exactly. I mean, he heard me. Very polite man. We had open discourse. **I remember him being firm about wanting that language in there.** That's all I remember.

...

Q: I do want to ask about that. But, first, I just want to stick with this meat packing guidance. Let's look back at Exhibit 1, if we can, which is the actual guidance itself.

A: Okay.

Q: And this guidance also contained qualifiers like "if possible" and "if feasible," similar to what appeared in the April 22 Smithfield memo. If it's helpful, one example is on page 3, in the first paragraph, which says, "Add additional clock in/out stations, if possible, that are spaced apart, to reduce crowding in these areas."

Q: Do you know if you or any of your colleagues consulted the April 22nd Smithfield memo during the process of formulating this guidance?

A: **This is more of the same, isn't it?** So when was the release of this one?

Q: This was April 26th, 2020.

A: And the memo was Exhibit 3, you said?

Q: Yes. And that was April 22nd, for reference.

A: Right. So I mean, **it is a similar conversation around -- almost the same conversation about utilizing this type of, "if feasible," "if possible" language in our guidance.** So it's not something that we want to do, but -- and as I said before, it gives more flexibility, and it gives a lot of flexibility, I think, in the recommendation. So it's something we try to stay away from.

Q: Do you recall having any discussions with Dr. Redfield on including language like that in this guidance, separate from the discussions you had in connection with the April 22nd memo?

A: To me, **it's sort of the continuation of the same conversation, which is to give this kind of flexibility in our guidance. So Dr. Redfield really wanted this type of language in the guidance, and so that's what we did.**