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Total Recall

Recent recalls require re-evaluation of quality control measures, experts say

From December 2007

With high-profile recalls so much in the news of late, the industry is not only focusing on quality assurance and improving manufacturing practices around the world, but also on how to effectively and efficiently manage the recall of potentially harmful products.

There are many aspects to reverse logistics, "but the first has got to be notification – finding out which stores have tainted merchandise, alerting them that they have it and telling them how to send it back or destroy it," says Tom Kozenski, vice president of product strategy for Waukesha, Wis.-based RedPrairie.

The cornerstone of RedPrairie's recall strategy is its centralized database of shipping information: It provides end-to-end visibility across supply chains, thus enabling companies to know where all products came from and where they are located. "From there, we can automate instructions on what to do with products – whether they can be sent back or simply destroyed," Kozenski says. "And if they are sending product back, we can make sure we get them the vehicle to do it."

While manufacturers are primarily responsible for recalls, they are working closely with retailers on moving the product. "Without the proper tools, it becomes a manual instruction or necessitates a lot of phone calls and e-mails," Kozenski says. "A real-time system is essential. Without it, it could take hours to figure out who's got the recalled merchandise.

"If you don't know who's got it, you can end up taking everything from every store off the shelves; we've seen that happen."

RedPrairie's warehouse management solutions also facilitate recalls. "If the merchandise being picked up is going back to a warehouse that has our system, we have the information at the warehouse on what to expect and in what quantities in order to confirm all returns," Kozenski says.

"It's good to have historical information on what you got back for those who are accountable to government agencies or outside auditors. It also gives firms a good understanding of how much product is still out there that has to be recovered."