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## Bush Forms Cabinet Committee to Study Safety of U.S. Imports



President Bush with Michael Chertoff, secretary of homeland security, left, and Michael O. Leavitt, secretary of health and human services.

By **DAVID STOUT**  
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WASHINGTON, July 18 — President Bush on Wednesday announced the creation of a panel of cabinet officials who will look for ways to minimize the dangers from food and other products shipped into the United States.

Mr. Bush established the panel, to be known as the Interagency Working Group on Import Safety, by executive order. Although the step coincides with concern about tainted imports from China, the White House insisted that the safety effort was not aimed at that country.

“This is, in fact, a normal piece of business,” the White House spokesman, [Tony Snow](#), told reporters. “We get food imports from 150 countries around the world. It’s important to monitor them all.”

The president’s order said the panel would try to identify actions that could be taken “within existing resources” to improve import safety, including reviews of cooperation with foreign governments and manufacturers regarding their inspection and certification procedures.

Democrats on Capitol Hill, who have been calling for a quick response to evidence of flawed imports of food and consumer products, criticized the step as inadequate.

“Establishing a product safety panel is like stamping out a single leaf in a forest fire,” said Senator Sherrod Brown, Democrat of Ohio, who is promoting legislation that would give the [Food and Drug Administration](#) stronger powers to regulate food imports and more money to inspect them.

The chairman of the panel will be the secretary of health and human services, [Michael O. Leavitt](#), and members will include Secretary of State [Condoleezza Rice](#), Treasury Secretary [Henry M. Paulson Jr.](#), Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns, Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez, Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff and Attorney General [Alberto R. Gonzales](#).

The president’s order said the group would also include the director of the [Office of Management and Budget](#), the United States trade representative, the administrator of the [Environmental Protection Agency](#), the chairman of the [Consumer Product Safety](#)

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[Commission](#) and other officials to be determined by Mr. Leavitt. The order specified that the new group was to present its recommendations to the president in 60 days, unless Mr. Leavitt wants more time.

The United States recently blocked imports of catfish, shrimp and other seafood from China after tests disclosed contamination with drugs not approved in the United States. Juices and toothpaste made in China have also been found to be tainted.

In Beijing on Wednesday, Chinese food regulators announced that five days of meetings with their American counterparts would begin on July 31 in China.

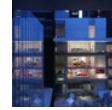
*Eric Lipton contributed reporting.*

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