

## KickStart

Gets you started on key issues:

- What are the issues?
- Does it affect us?
- What do we do next?

*EC regulations affect everything from a hot dog stand to a 5-star hotel and include churches! Anyone who handles food or whose actions could affect its safety must follow the regulations.*

*Food cooked at home for private consumption is **not** covered by the regulations, e.g. Alpha courses, Church lunches, bring and share, etc., However, as Alpha courses grow and catering becomes more elaborate it is advisable to be aware of the issues.*

# Food hygiene

## What are the issues?

The numbers of food poisoning cases have increased dramatically in the last few years and good food hygiene is vital to prevent the spread of germs.

Causes of food poisoning:

- food prepared too far in advance
- not cooking food properly
- storing food incorrectly
- cross-contamination after cooking
- infection due to poor hygiene procedures
- poor personal hygiene of food handlers

Food poisoning is potentially lethal! Most at risk are babies, young children, pregnant women and the elderly.

## What areas are covered?

The regulations let you assess the risks and then apply controls that are relevant to your own situation – the onus is on you to check and ensure that adequate controls are in place – to exercise *due diligence*.

The following is a list of potential areas an Environmental Health officer might look at:

- cleanliness of premises
- layout and design
- water supplies
- toilets and handwashing
- washbasins
- ventilation
- lighting
- changing facilities
- food preparation areas
- cleaning and disinfecting of tools
- utensils and equipment
- washing of food
- food storage temperatures
- food handling practices: processing, transportation,

distribution, packaging, storage, supplying

- disposal of waste food.

## What should I do?

1. Identify all the steps in your activities that are critical to food safety.
2. Set in place adequate controls.

The controls do not have to be complicated but they must be effective and minimise the risks. For example:

- Where do you buy your supplies and raw materials from? Is it a reputable source?
- Who checks the *use by* dates or the temperature of the fridge/freezer?
- Is there an established and effective cleaning routine?
- Do the staff wear hair nets or hats?
- Who ensures they have washed their hands, particularly after a trip to the loo or having just put out the sack of rubbish?
- Are the dishcloths clean?
- Have the tea towels been washed or just dried?
- Is the first aid kit checked regularly?

## Training

The official line is

- "All food handlers must be supervised and instructed and/or trained in food hygiene matters to a level appropriate to their job."

Your catering supervisor should have at least a Basic Hygiene Certificate. Courses are readily available – local colleges may be able to help or ask the environmental health officer. Costs from £25 per day per person.

## Further advice

First stop should be your local council Environmental Health

Officer (EHO) who will advise on how the regulations affect your particular arrangements and whether you need a visit or simply to talk through the issues. They will also send out free booklets that give the guidelines in some detail.

It is important to note that there are some local variations in advice given and therefore you should not rely on the experience of those outside your area.

Also try The Department of Health, Room 501A Skipton House, 80 London Road, London SE16LW, who will send you free booklets on request.

## Registration of premises

Registration of premises used for a 'food business' is required by law, allowing local authorities to inspect them as necessary.

If you run a food business for 5 or more days in any 5 consecutive weeks you must inform the local authority about any premises you use for storing, selling, distributing or preparing food. Anyone starting a new food business must register with the local authority at least 28 days before doing so.

In buildings used by different groups maintaining standards of hygiene is never an easy task and needs real commitment by everyone. But someone needs to ensure that all reasonable care has been taken and is *duly diligent* as this is a defence if a problem should arise. The public liability insurance cover should be checked to confirm it embraces food provision.

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