

## Guidance for re-commissioning vacuum packers

### What is re-commissioning?

Re-commissioning is the process of dismantling, cleaning and disinfecting the parts of a vacuum packer.

Due to the potential for the survival of *E. coli* O157, and to help prevent cross-contamination, all vacuum packers that are to be re-commissioned must be made safe prior to use for ready-to-eat food, with suitable cleaning and disinfection techniques.

Any food business using a vacuum packer should follow the manufacturer's instructions on regular cleaning, servicing and maintenance.

To ensure effective disinfection the internal components of the machines need to be accessible and where necessary removed for full cleaning and disinfection. Some machines cannot be effectively dismantled and disinfected. These machines **must not** be used for both raw and ready-to-eat food.

### How is a machine re-commissioned?

A full dismantle should only be undertaken by a competent engineer as the internal components need to be accessible, cleaned and disinfected. For example, an experienced vacuum packer engineer or someone familiar with [CE marking requirements](#).

The vacuum packer needs to be completely stripped down to expose an empty machine chamber. This should include, for example, the removal of the sealing bars, infill boards, vacuum pump, pipe work and other internal items.

The chamber and the internal components that have been removed should either be heat disinfected (for example using a steamer) or chemically disinfected using appropriate chemicals, concentration and contact times, prior to the machine being put back together.

Chemical disinfectants used in this process must comply with **BS EN 1276:2009** or **BS EN 13697:2001** or an equivalent standard.



It is unlikely that the re-commissioning process can be done effectively by usual kitchen staff or during the normal operations of a working day.

Vacuum packers that have deteriorated or are damaged such that they can no longer be thoroughly cleaned / disinfected **must not** be used. Depending on the degree of deterioration or damage, re-commissioning may not be possible.

## When should a machine be re-commissioned?

Circumstances that require a vacuum packer to undergo re-commissioning include (this list is not exhaustive):

- if the owner / operator cannot be sure of its previous use
- raw food has inadvertently been processed in a machine designated for ready-to-eat food only
- the use of the machine is to be changed from raw food to ready-to-eat food
- the use of the machine is prohibited by enforcement action on the evidence that it is not safe for use with ready-to-eat food, unless effectively re-commissioned
- any other time where contamination from a source of *E. coli* 0157 may have occurred and the machine is due to be used for ready-to-eat food

## How should I record the re-commissioning?

Keep a record of each time the machine has been re-commissioned. Verification of effective cleaning can consist of a signed and dated cleaning schedule from the competent person documenting:

- the procedure followed
- the disinfection method used (heat or chemical)
- if heat disinfection, the time and temperature combination used
- if chemical disinfection, the specific chemical, the contact time and the concentration used
- who undertook the process

## Open government licence

© Crown copyright 2019

This publication is licensed under the terms of the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#) except where otherwise stated. Where we have identified any third-party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

To view this licence:

Visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

Email [psi@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gov.uk)

Write to: Information Policy Team  
The National Archives  
Kew  
London  
TW9 4DU

About this publication:

Enquiries: <https://www.food.gov.uk/contact/businesses/find-details>



Follow us on  
Twitter: [@foodgov](https://twitter.com/foodgov)



Like us on Facebook:  
[facebook.com/FoodStandardsAgency](https://facebook.com/FoodStandardsAgency)