

Guidelines for re-commissioning vacuum packers

1. Any food business using a vacuum packer should follow the manufacturer's instructions on regular cleaning, servicing and maintenance.
2. Due to the potential for the extended survival of *E. coli* O157, and to help prevent cross-contamination, all vacuum packers that are to be re-commissioned¹ must be made safe prior to use for ready-to-eat (RTE) foods, with suitable cleaning and disinfection techniques.
3. Circumstances that require a vacuum packer to undergo re-commissioning include (this list is not exhaustive), when:
 - i. The owner/operator is unaware of its previous use.
 - ii. Raw foods have inadvertently been processed in a machine designated for RTE foods only.
 - iii. The use of the machine is to be changed from raw to RTE foods.
 - iv. The use of the machine is prohibited by enforcement action on the evidence that it is not safe for use with RTE foods, unless effectively re-commissioned.

Depending on the degree of deterioration or damage re-commissioning may not be possible². Vacuum packers that have deteriorated or are damaged such that they can no longer be thoroughly cleaned/disinfected must not be used.

4. To ensure effective disinfection the internal components of vacuum packing machines need to be accessible and where necessary removed for full cleaning and disinfection. As such, a fully competent person who is also familiar with hygiene and Health and Safety controls³, needs to undertake this process to ensure that the procedure is safe and effective. For example an experienced vacuum packer engineer or someone familiar with CE Marking requirements⁴.
5. 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.
6. 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 chemicals⁵, concentration and contact times, prior to the machine being put back together.
8. Verification of effective cleaning can consist of a signed and dated cleaning schedule from the competent person documenting: the procedure followed; the disinfection used, such as heat (including the time temperature combinations) or chemical (including the type of chemical, the contact time and the concentration); and who undertook the process.

1 Re-commissioning definition – prescribed method to be undertaken which, if followed correctly, should ensure the machine is safe for use with ready-to-eat foods.

2 Machinery supplied for use at work from 1995 should be CE marked to indicate that it was designed to comply with the European Machinery Directive, which includes requirements for hygienic design. Detailed guidance on hygienic design requirements of the Machinery Directive can be found in BS EN 1672-2:2005+A1:2009 Food Processing Machinery Basic Concepts Part 2: Hygiene Requirements, BSI.

3 Appropriate health and safety (H&S) controls must be in place to make sure that the decommissioning and recommissioning process meets H&S requirements

4 Further information: <https://www.gov.uk/ce-marking>

5 Chemicals used must meet the requirements of BS EN 1276 or BS EN 13697 or other standards that meet the same conditions and requirements