

Principles for preventing and responding to food incidents



A guidance document for small businesses produced by The Food Incidents Taskforce

Key obligations of food and feed businesses

Safety	Businesses must not place on the market unsafe food and feed.
Responsibility	Businesses are responsible for the safety of the food and feed that they produce, import, pack, transport, store or sell.
Traceability	Businesses must be able to rapidly identify any immediate supplier or customer.
Emergency	Businesses must immediately withdraw food or feed from the market if they have reason to believe that it is not safe.
Transparency	<p>Businesses must inform the competent authorities if they have withdrawn unsafe food from the market or have reason to believe that their food or feed is injurious to health.</p> <p>In the UK, the competent authorities are the Food Standards Agency, the relevant enforcement authority (i.e. your local authority) or the port health authority. In relation to feed in Northern Ireland, the competent authority is the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD).</p>
Prevention	Businesses must identify and regularly review the critical points in their processes and ensure that controls are applied at these points.
Co-operation	Businesses must co-operate with the competent authorities in actions taken to reduce risks.

1. What is a food incident?

An incident is when there are concerns about actual or suspected threats to the safety or the quality of food or feed, including when food or feed does not meet legal requirements.

2. How can you prevent an incident happening?

All businesses, irrespective of size, should be taking all reasonable precautions to ensure that the produce they supply meets safety requirements. While the precautions small businesses take may not be as extensive as those taken by a larger business, even small businesses, at all stages of the food or feed chain, must take reasonable precautions to ensure that their produce meets food or feed safety requirements. Actions you can take may include the following.

a. Use trusted sources of raw materials and ingredients

Do you:

- ▀ source your raw materials and ingredients from suppliers that have registered with their local enforcement authority?
- ▀ source your raw materials and ingredients from suppliers that have recognised certification or have demonstrated that they are working to good-practice systems and procedures?
- ▀ ask your suppliers if they routinely check that their raw materials and ingredients comply with relevant legislation?

b. Utilise assurance schemes

Have you asked your supplier:

- ▀ which assurance schemes are available for their raw material or ingredients?
- ▀ if they supply raw materials and ingredients that comply with these schemes?
- ▀ if they are a producer of primary products, are they themselves certificated under an industry assurance scheme for the product they wish to supply, such as Assured Food Standards, Eurepgap or organic certification?
- ▀ if they can provide evidence of certification and any other relevant information confirming compliance with legislation, such as test certificates from reputable laboratories?

c. Utilise food safety management standards

Are you aware if the supplier participates in, or complies with, any industry-recognised food safety management standards?

- Trade association standards – e.g. BRC (British Retail Consortium Standard – Food), IFS (the International Food Standard) or the BRC/IoP (British Retail Consortium/Institute of Packaging Standard – Packaging)
- Customer standards – many large companies set detailed quality standards
- Small business standards – e.g. SALSA (Safe and Local Supplier Approval)

d. Implement food safety management systems

All food businesses should have a system in place to identify where in their operations food safety issues may arise, what measures are in place to address these, and that records are completed to confirm that suitable checking has taken place. This should include systems to ensure that the correct labelling is applied to the product.

Food safety management systems incorporate a system called Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP), which is specifically designed to help you identify and control any risk. HACCP is used to identify steps in operations that are critical to food safety. It is useful to monitor your food process at these steps, to enable the reduction or prevention of food risks.

- The HACCP system should identify, for example, where temperature has a critical role to ensure food safety, the need for cleaning of specific equipment, or the need for staff to take suitable hygiene training.
- Documented records and log sheets showing control data and 'actions taken' are able to demonstrate that food safety precautions are being followed.

e. Gain local authority help

Do you know that as well as enforcing food safety laws, your local authority is able to provide you with advice and guidance on how you could control and reduce food safety risks?

3. What do I do if a food incident happens in my business?

Businesses are legally required to inform their local authority, port health authority and the Food Standards Agency if there is reason to believe that food or feed is not compliant with food or feed safety requirements.

If in any doubt, contact your local authority, or the FSA.

Businesses must immediately notify the Food Standards Agency if their food is considered injurious to health.

tel 020 7276 8448 (out of hours: 020 7270 8960)

Alternatively, inform the FSA online, using the incident notification report form at:
food.gov.uk/foodindustry/regulation/foodfeedform

Businesses must also notify their local authority

The number can be found in the telephone book. Please enter it here:

The Food Standards Agency or local authority will advise you of any action you might need to take.

Businesses should immediately withdraw, or if necessary recall, food if they have reason to believe it is unsafe.

If the products do not meet food standards requirements, such as labelling or quality issues, where there is no safety issue, then you might wish to ensure that products are withdrawn, rather than risk prosecution.

- 'Recall' means that food is removed from the market, where the food has reached customers and they are advised, for example by means of public notices and other publicity, to return or destroy food supplied to them. The advice given to the customer will include the reason for the recall.
- 'Withdrawn' means that food is removed from the market up to and including the retail stage, but customers are not asked to return or destroy the product.

4. Why do I need traceability?

Traceability is an essential part of your food safety management system and accurate records will greatly assist when an incident occurs. As a minimum, you should have your records sufficiently organised to be produced within the short timescale needed to be of use in a withdrawal or recall of unsafe food. Internal traceability, i.e. the matching up of all inputs to outputs, is not legally required.

Businesses are legally required to be able to identify their suppliers and the businesses to whom they have supplied products.

You should also do the following:

- Identify the name and address of suppliers of food, feed, food-producing animals and ingredients
- Identify the customers to which you have supplied products
- Identify the date of delivery or despatch and the volume or quantity
- Identify the volume or quantity delivered or dispatched
- Maintain appropriate records and ensure that such information can be provided to authorities on demand

Some questions that food and feed businesses should ask themselves include:

- How reliable and useful are your traceability records?
- How long are your records stored? Take into account the length of time customers may store and use the product.
- Are traceability records readily available?
- In the event of an incident, would you be able to easily narrow down the problem to the affected batch or batches?

5. How can I find out more?

Contact your local authority. Remember that, as well as enforcing laws, local authorities are able to provide advice on actions you could be taking to reduce food safety risks.

FSA information and guidance

Safer food, better business (SFBB) is an innovative and practical approach to food safety management, developed by the Food Standards Agency. There are SFBB packs for small **catering** and small **retail** businesses, plus packs for different cuisines. See food.gov.uk/sfbb for more information.

FSA Scotland has developed a HACCP-based system called 'Cook Safe' and FSA Northern Ireland has developed one called 'Safe Catering'.

Further guidance is available in a more comprehensive version of this document, which includes details of hazard analysis, risk management and internet links to sources of information described here, including European legislation. This is available from the Food Standards Agency website, food.gov.uk

It is called 'Principles for preventing and responding to food incidents' and contains the following sections:

Module 1 – Incident Prevention

Module 2 – Incident Response

Module 3 – The Agency Incident Response

Module 4 – Enforcement Authorities Incident Response

FOOD ALERTS enable the FSA to inform its partners about food safety issues as they arise. Food alerts are sent by email or text message and you can sign up for these at food.gov.uk/subscribe

This factsheet has been produced by the Food Incidents Taskforce, which was chaired by the **Food Standards Agency** with members drawn from the following organisations:

British Hospitality Association (BHA)

British Retail Consortium (BRC)

Chartered Institute Of Environmental Health (CIEH)

Trading Standards Institute (TSI)

Food And Drink Federation (FDF)

Local Authorities Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS)

Small Business Council (SBC)

National Consumer Council (NCC)

National Farmers Union (NFU)

Which?

Plus two independent members:

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www.food.gov.uk

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