

CLUTHA DISTRICT COUNCIL

ADVICE FOR HOME CATERERS

FOOD HYGIENE GUIDANCE

The use of domestic premises for commercial purposes presents local authorities with a number of difficulties. These relate to both the requirements of the law as well as to practical problems that home caterers need to be able to resolve in order to manage their businesses both safely and economically.

RESOURCE CONSENT IMPLICATIONS

In some instances, use of a domestic premise may be incompatible for commercial activity and a resource consent may be required. Advice should therefore be sought on this aspect as an important first step before any further planning is carried out. Types of activity and types of premises are so wide that specific advice cannot be included within an information pamphlet such as this and you will need to contact the Council in order to discuss your proposals in person.

There may also be Building Act implications, depending upon the type of catering involved. Grease traps, for example, may be required where there is a possibility of grease being discharged into the drainage system.

In the majority of cases, however, a separate facility which is entirely devoted to the handling of food will be required and which will not also be used for domestic purposes. This aspect is discussed below in greater detail.

FOOD HYGIENE IMPLICATIONS

There are a number of distinct areas which will need to be considered. These can be summarised as follows:-

1. **Where and what food products to buy?**
2. **Storage facilities**
3. **Food handling**
4. **Food transport**
5. **Food service**
6. **Hygienic practices and personal hygiene**

These are dealt with in more detail below.

1. Where and What Food Products to Buy?



Always purchase from a reputable, registered supplier who you can trust. Building up a relationship with a supplier who understands your needs has other distinct benefits such as access to discounts and better service with orders which may be required at short notice.

- 😊 Arrange for deliveries as close as possible to the event for which you are catering. This minimises storage requirements and makes it easier to guarantee temperature control of perishable food stuffs.
- 😊 Wherever it is possible and practicable, arrange for your deliveries direct to the customer's premises. Once again this is an advantage which comes from developing a good relationship with your suppliers. Always make sure that there is someone responsible to check deliveries whenever they are received. This makes sure that you get what was ordered and avoids disappointing your customers. It also gives you an opportunity to make sure that deliveries are in good order, e.g. that frozen food is still solid [and has not been re-frozen] or that chilled food is cold enough.
- 💣 No matter how appealing always decline 'offers' from any source that you do not know or have doubts about. It is not only your customers health that you are gambling with, it is your business reputation as well!

2. Storage Facilities

- 😊 Store all salad materials in a cool place and preferably in the bottom of a refrigerator.
- 😊 Make sure that all foods, particularly perishable ones, are properly rotated and that all 'Use By' dates are properly observed.
- 😊 Regularly check the operating temperatures for freezers and refrigerators. Freezers should be kept at -18°C and refrigerators should be at 2°C for fresh meat and fish and 4°C for other foods. Make sure that perishable foods are kept under refrigeration or frozen except when they are being prepared.
- 😊 Use correct refrigerator storage techniques whereby cooked products are stored on upper shelves and raw products beneath. In this way the risk of contamination by juices from raw products dripping onto foods which will receive no further cooking is reduced.
- 😊 Dry goods should be stored within their original packaging until they are used. Unused material should be stored within sealable, washable containers.
- 😊 Use good rotation techniques such as 'First In, First Out'. This is nothing more complicated than stacking at the rear and using from the front.

3. Food Handling

- 😊 Make sure that all food equipment and work surfaces are properly washed and sanitised before use. To achieve this use hot water and detergent to wash, followed by a hot water rinse. Work surfaces can then be sanitised using a food grade sanitising agent available from a commercial cleaning material supplier. Finally, dry the surface with a clean, paper towel. Cleaning and sanitising will also be necessary at the end of the day and periodically during food preparation.
- 😊 Ideally separate equipment should be used when working with cooked and raw foods, particularly raw meat, poultry and vegetables. Where this is not practicable, equipment and work surfaces will need to be washed and sanitised as described above. Handling cooked foods before raw will also help reduce the potential for cross contamination.

- ☺ Where hot food is to be prepared, this should ideally be at the customer's own premises where temperatures can be controlled easily. If this is not practicable [e.g. where the customer does not have the correct facilities] food should be cooked as close as possible to the time of consumption. There are then two options available:-
- (i) The food may be cooled quickly and placed under refrigeration until such time as it may be thoroughly reheated immediately prior to consumption. A microwave or convector oven is best for this purpose.
 - (ii) The food is kept at a temperature of 63°C or above until consumed. Insulated 'Chilly Bins' will help but food may need to be wrapped within cooking foil in order to keep it at a high enough temperature.
- ☺ When cooking larger joints of meat it is good practice to use a probe thermometer to check that the internal temperature has reached a satisfactory level. 85°C is normally recommended for this purpose. Probe thermometers are also useful for checking the temperatures of foods on display [hot or cold] but remember to sanitise them before and after each use.
- ☺ There is a great deal of choice in commercially prepared foods suitable for buffets and self service tables. These limit the amount of preparation work that is required and they can be stored within original packaging until required.
- ☺ Keep handling of food to a minimum, particularly after cooking. If latex gloves are used make sure that they are changed frequently. Gloves must always be changed between handling different foods to prevent cross contamination. Remember that they are **not** a substitute for frequent and thorough hand washing. [See below]
- ☺ Keep perishable food such as meat, fish, poultry, dairy products, cooked rice and pasta out of the 'danger zone' temperatures of 4°C to 63°C. This means handling food promptly and once preparation work is finished either keeping food hot or cooling it as quickly as possible before putting it back into refrigeration.

4. Transporting Food

- ☺ Suppliers delivering direct [as discussed above] is always useful provided that there is someone available to take delivery and make all of the required checks.
- ☹ Any vehicle used to transport food must be clean and should not be used for any other purpose that could contaminate food such as transporting animals, chemicals or waste materials.
- ☺ All food transported within vehicles must be protected from contamination. Original packaging or within covered, washable containers will suffice. Perishable foods should be in insulated containers together with freezer packs or cooking foil to help keep them hot or cold as necessary.
- ☺ Journey times should be kept to a minimum in order to ensure that temperatures are not adversely affected. It is recommended that journeys should not exceed one hour and this may need to be even shorter during particularly hot weather. Likewise it may be reasonable to travel a bit further if the weather is cold.

5. Service of Food

In many instances customers may request that service of food be included within the overall catering package over and above the production and delivery of the food that they require. Producing food and delivering to a customer for them to serve themselves is very different in terms of the legal implications that apply.

If service is included at a customer's premises, the caterer takes on responsibility for the premises themselves and for any equipment that is used in the course of the activity which the customer has supplied. Depending upon the circumstances this may require the caterer to secure local authority registration.

It is therefore a wise precaution to check out the premises and the circumstances before agreeing to provide a complete catering service. Here are a few obvious things to look for:-



- Are they clean and hygienic?
- Is there adequate power, lighting and ventilation?
- Is there an adequate hot water supply?
- Are there adequate facilities for washing food and equipment?
- Are there adequate facilities for washing crockery and cutlery in the form of a dish washer or sterilising sink?
- Are there adequate facilities for refrigeration and freezer space?



If food is to be served hot a supply of hot plates will be required. These come in the form of electrically heated plates to small units heated by night light candles. Obviously whatever is chosen will have safety implications in their correct use. Bain maries may also be an option worth looking at, if necessary from a cater hire company.



Where food is to be served cold, keep it under refrigeration for as long as possible. In order to minimise the length of time that risk foods are left at room temperature it may be possible to hold quantities in reserve and to replenish on a frequent basis. Not only does this make good sense from a hygiene perspective, it also helps to make sure that everyone gets a fair chance at the more popular choices and the food is always as fresh as possible.



Other points to consider are utensils for serving [tongs, spoons, etc] mopping up spillages and generally keeping the display looking presentable. This will help to promote a professional service and enhance your business reputation.

GOOD HYGIENE ALSO MAKES GOOD BUSINESS!

6. Hygienic Practices and Personal Hygiene



As mentioned at the start of this leaflet, there are practical problems that home catering presents. Not the least of these is the potential conflict of interest presented from the dual use of facilities, i.e. for commercial as well as domestic use. It is for this reason that in most instances separate preparation facilities will be required. Provided the household water closet is conveniently accessible, however, the Council will usually permit its use by food handlers.



All food handlers need to take pride in their appearance. This relates not only to their standard of dress and use of head covering and over-clothing, but also to their everyday wear beneath. Being well groomed with clean hands and neatly trimmed finger nails speaks volumes about the way in which you run your business and the care that you take with your customers' food. People do take note of these things because of concerns about the safety of the food that we eat and which has been prepared by others. In the absence of other indicators, details such as these are all that people have to go on when they form opinions about YOU!



Hand washing is one of the most important safeguards for clean food that food handlers must practice. This requires hot water, a nailbrush, a suitable soap [preferably anti bacterial] and sufficient TIME. A quick, perfunctory rinse under the cold tap is not sufficient. Hands need to be scrubbed and thoroughly washed in hot water, particularly after using the lavatory. Drying hands provides the final touch and in order to make this fully effective we recommend either paper towels, a roller towel or an air blower. Remember that you may need to take hand washing facilities with you if you cannot be sure that your customer's premises can provide them.



Keep all cuts, sores and abrasions covered with a water proof first aid dressing followed with either a clean finger stall or latex glove. Make sure that these are changed frequently if they are liable to become soiled. A dirty first aid dressing is anecdotal in terms of destroying a hard won reputation that has taken years to develop.



Make a special effort to let your customers see that you take hygiene and food safety seriously. Coughing and sneezing around the food that you have prepared will give out all of the wrong messages. Clean up spillages quickly and discard any food or equipment that is dropped or mishandled in any way. Keep food covered as much as possible, especially when it is on display before or after a sitting.

This leaflet cannot be an exhaustive guide to all possible queries that you may have. Should you require any further information or assistance, please do not hesitate to contact the Council's Environmental Health Officers at:-

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