

The Purpose of Food Hygiene Inspections

Qu: *Who should inspect a food business?*

Ans: Food safety inspections are undertaken by fully qualified and experienced Environmental Health Officers who have been authorised by the council to enforce the regulations. However, the duty to control risk rests with the proprietor of the food business and the responsibility cannot be delegated.

Qu: *Why do the council's Environmental Health Officers carry out inspections?*

Ans: Experience has shown that independent inspection can identify risks, which have been overlooked by the business. Furthermore some businesses are prepared to ignore their responsibilities and must be identified.

The Government requirements are that, as a general rule, these visits must be unannounced.

Qu: *What are the officers looking for?*

Ans: We are trying to establish whether food is being handled, produced and stored hygienically. Our aim is to ensure only safe food, which does not involve a risk of food poisoning or injury, gets onto the market.

Qu: *What will the officers do when they visit?*

Ans: They will want to ask you questions and gather information. They will observe, talk to your staff, examine records and make notes. They may also take photographs and ask for copies of documentation

Qu: *What will the officers ask about?*

Ans: We need to know the scope of your business and information on where you source food, what you produce, where it is sold and the quantities involved are all relevant.

The Officers will ask you to describe your techniques and procedures and will want to know if you have identified any hazards and taken steps to ensure the food is produced safely. They will make an assessment of the Hazard Analysis or Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) based food safety management system operated by your business.

Qu: *Will they tell me what they have decided?*

Ans: Yes, at the end of the inspection the inspector will tell you of any specific contraventions of legislation that have been identified and will describe how they should be remedied. Advice would also be given to food proprietors on the supervision and/or training of food handlers. In addition advice on best practice may also be given.

A written 'report of visit' will be left with you by the inspector and it will show any action, which is to be taken.

Qu: *What happens if there are contraventions of the Food Safety legislation?*

Ans: The council has an enforcement policy which determines what enforcement action is appropriate. The majority of matters are dealt with by means of a letter detailing what is wrong and how and when to remedy the problem. In other cases, where there may have been a history of non-compliance the Officer can serve a legal "Improvement Notice" or can recommend legal proceedings for serious breaches of the regulations.

Qu: *Does the information, which the officer has gathered, have any other purpose?*

Ans: Yes, the detailed assessment of your premises will include identifying the type of food, your handling methods and the processing methods. The officer will also seek to establish the number of consumers who would be at risk were your food safety systems to be unsatisfactory. Current compliance with the legislation and the quality of your food safety systems are also assessed.

Finally the officer will determine if there is a significant risk of the food from your business being contaminated with any of the most dangerous food poisoning organisms.

To ensure consistency throughout the U.K. the Food Standards Agency have produced scores, which are to be given for each of these factors. The total score determines the frequency at which your premises must be inspected.

Qu: *Does a high frequency mean I run an 'unclean' business?*

Ans: No, the score merely identifies the combination of circumstances above.

Qu: *How are premises selected for inspection?*

Ans: The scores determine the frequency and our computer system generates the lists of premises due for inspection.

In the past we didn't have the resources to meet the number of inspections due and some premises may have been inspected more frequently than, for example, a neighbours. By using consultants we can now meet our targets and treat all businesses in the same way.

Qu: *Do I have to admit the inspectors?*

Ans: Yes. If you are trading then you must grant entry. The officers will try to minimise any inconvenience but a refusal to permit entry is an offence and we do prosecute.