

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND PROBLEMS ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**

### **My workplace is too cold**

Health and safety regulations require that the temperature of indoor workplaces must, within working hours, be reasonable. There are minimum temperature requirements but, surprisingly, no maximum. However, the employer is required to address hot working conditions and have suitable policies and procedures in place to ensure the welfare of employees.

### **What do I do if I am concerned about Health & safety at my workplace?**

All businesses proprietors have a duty to ensure the health safety and welfare of their employees and members of the public. If you are concerned about a health and safety issue at your workplace, it may be possible to resolve it by just telling a manager. If the issue affects a group of workers any discussions are best carried out with all those involved. Better, if there is a Union, the issue can be led through the union representative. It is good practice to record the details of discussions with management and agreed actions. If you have an unresolved issue relating to health and safety the Environmental Health Officer will advise you.

### **What do I have to do if I have a blocked drain?**

The drains are the responsibility of the owner of the property even outside the curtilage of the property. If more than 1 property feeds into the system it is then classed as a sewer. Thames Water are responsible for clearing sewers built before 1st October 1937 and sewers that have been adopted as a public sewers. Thames Water can be contacted on 0845 9200 800. Sewer systems built after this date and not adopted as public sewers are private sewers and the responsibility of the owners of the properties feeding into it. You will need to reach an agreement with your neighbours to fund the clearance a blocked drain. The Council has legal powers to require drains and sewers to be cleared and should they remain blocked the authority can arrange for contractors to carryout works in default and re-charge for the work undertaken.

### **I intend to start up a new food business, what do I need?**

You must have a good knowledge of food hygiene practice for the type of food business they are opening. You should know the risks associated with foods you intend to prepare and a thorough understanding of the controls that must be in place to keep food safer to eat. You are responsible for registering the business with the Council and if you don't your could be prosecuted. A form for registering your business is available here:

Registration form

<http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/worddocs/registrationform.doc>

The Food Standards Agency provides free advice on line and offers free resources to help food business operators comply with the law. Please use the links below to enter the Food Standard Agency's website:

General introduction:

<http://www.food.gov.uk/enforcement/enforceessential/startingup/startingup>

Safer Food Better Business:

<http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/regulation/hygleg/hyglegresources/sfbb/sfbbcaterers/>

General resources

<http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/regulation/hygleg/hyglegresources/>

Many caterers operate from their family home and this is perfectly acceptable. You will still need to comply with the law and register your business.

### **Sometimes I prepare food at home for sale at fetes or community events. Do I need to be registered and my kitchen inspected?**

Unless you are doing this on a regular and organised basis, food safety law is not intended to control such small scale food production so you need not worry too much. But, be mindful that you remain personally responsible for producing safe food.

### **What should I do if a food shop handles money and then food without washing their hands?**

The surface of money does not provide the right conditions for bacteria to grow, making cross contamination from money to food unlikely. However, the staff in food premises must maintain good personal hygiene by wearing clean over clothing and washing their hands regularly. The use of tongs is recommended, as a means of minimising handling of foods, but equipment needs regular cleaning as well. Contact environmental health with the name and address of the premises and we can contact them to remind that of there responsibilities for staff personal hygiene.

### **What does food past its "Sell By"; "Best Before" or "Use By" date mean?**

The term "sell by" is a common mistake people make when describing the date on the food they have brought. Some years ago "sell by" was replaced on labels by "use by" on fresh perishable products and "best before" on stored products. The "use by" date is absolute and it is an offence to sell a product after the expiry of the use-by date. It is also an offence to interfere with the use by date by altering it or covering it up.

The "best before" date is a guide date placed on a long life product by the manufacturer. It is meant to give a guide as to the likely shelf life under the recommended storage conditions. It is not an offence to sell a product after the best before date providing it is fit to eat. Food may remain perfectly edible many years after the best before date has expired, but the quality of the food may be compromised.

### **What do I do if I find a foreign object in a food product?**

If you find a foreign object in your food and if it is a perishable food it's best to freeze the food in a plastic bag with the object in place. You should then either

(1) contact the manufacturer from the information on the packaging who will reimburse you for the costs involved, or

(2) you may contact the Environmental Health Section who will investigate your complaint and take any appropriate action.

**What do I do if I think the place I ate at last night gave me food poisoning?**

There are many causes of gastrointestinal illness and if you do become ill it is not necessarily caused by the last meal eaten. Different bacteria and viruses have different onset periods, symptoms and durations of illness and some are not always associated with contaminated food.

You should always contact your GP in the first instance, or speak to NHS Direct. Your GP may arrange for you to submit stool samples to the Public Health Laboratory if food poisoning is thought to be the cause of your illness, for this is the only way that food poisoning can be confirmed.

If you are suffering from a gastrointestinal illness and you are a professional working in the food industry you must tell your employer you are ill. You should not work in food production until you have had no symptoms for at least 24 hours and feel well in yourself.