FSANZ Code Interpretation Service

On 1 July 2011 Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) launched a new ‘Code Interpretation Service’. The service applies in Australia only and is designed to help the food industry interpret the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (the Code). It is designed to provide businesses with comprehensive advice on chapters 1 and 2 of the Code.

Under the new arrangements, businesses seeking to comply with the Code will have a central point from which they can seek interpretive advice. Advice will be published on the FSANZ website and will be adopted and applied by all state and territory food regulatory agencies. The CIS guidance is provided on a cost-recovery basis.

For more information on this service, visit the FSANZ website www.foodstandards.gov.au/foodstandards/codeinterpretationservice.

Doggy bags

It is not illegal for a food business to provide ‘doggy bags’ to customers. However, food businesses must ensure the food is safe to consume at the time it is provided to the customer. Once it is in the possession of the customer, it is the customer’s responsibility to ensure that they keep the food safe for consumption.

It is recommended that food businesses providing consumers with doggy bags also provide written instructions on how to manage the food safely.

‘Doggy bag’ stickers (see right) that contain advice for consumers about suitable storage and reheating conditions of food, are available for purchase from the Queensland Government bookshop. The purchase price of doggy bag stickers is $8.47 per roll of 100.


For further information and advice about doggy bags, refer to the Queensland Health food safety fact sheet ‘Food safety information for doggy bags’ at www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety.
National food surveillance

24th Australian Total Diet Study 2011

The Australian Total Diet Study (ATDS) is part of the process undertaken by FSANZ to monitor the Australia and New Zealand food supply to ensure that existing food regulatory measures provide adequate protection of consumer health and safety.

The ATDS estimates the level of dietary exposure of the Australian population to a range of pesticide residues, contaminants and other substances through the testing of food samples representative of the total diet. The study is conducted approximately every two years.

The study provides valuable data that can be used for developing or amending food regulatory measures to ensure the protection of public health and safety. For example, the results for iodine from the 22nd ATDS supported previous findings in relation to iodine deficiency and consequently, FSANZ introduced mandatory fortification of iodine in bread in September 2009 to enhance public health.

Survey of sulphite levels in sausages, cordial and dried fruit

A nationwide survey is currently in progress to gather data on sulphites in those foods which have been identified as the major contributors to dietary exposure to sulphites in children: sausages, cordial and dried fruit (other than dried apricots).

Sulphites are widely used by the food industry as food additives to preserve foodstuffs. They have antioxidant and antimicrobial properties, which prolong shelf life and enhance food quality and appearance (by inhibiting discoulouration).

While there are benefits to adding sulphites to food, a small section of the population have sensitivities to sulphites which are dependent on the level of exposure to foods containing sulphites. Those who are sensitive react with allergy-like symptoms, including skin rashes and irritations, and asthma.

The Code states the maximum levels of sulphites permitted in various foods. The issue of specific populations, namely children, consuming high levels of sulphite-containing foods, is being addressed by reviewing the current permissions for sulphites in the Code. This survey will be used to gather further data on sulphites in those foods which have been identified as the major contributors to children’s sulphites’ dietary exposure. Findings of the survey will be available on the FSANZ website www.foodstandards.gov.au when finalised.

Nutrition Panel Calculator

FSANZ have just launched a new Nutrition Panel Calculator (NPC) to assist food manufacturers and retailers to obtain average nutrient quantities for nutrition labelling.

The NPC is supported by a food composition database which contains nutrient data for more than 2500 foods/ingredients. The NPC database 2011 contains the most up-to-date and relevant data available, sourced from several published Australian food composition databases and nutrient values for foods consumed during national nutrition surveys.

The new look NPC has been designed around the steps that you would typically take to produce a nutrition information panel. There are four main steps. You need to:

1. Search the NPC database (or your custom list) for each ingredient in your recipe
2. Select and add each ingredient to your ingredient list, including the amount used
3. Enter your final recipe or batch weight (if it is different to the weight of your ingoing ingredients), the serve size and number of serves per package and
4. Produce your nutrition information panel and then print or save it.

Quick start user guide: www.foodstandards.gov.au/npc/assets/attachments/Quick%20start%20guide%20NPC%20040711.pdf
Hot topics

Food labelling review – release of final report

Following the Council of Australian Governments and the Australia New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council (Ministerial Council) agreeing to undertake a comprehensive review of food labelling law and policy in October 2009, the independent panel headed by former Australian Health Minister, Dr Neal Blewett AC, released it’s final report, Labelling Logic, on 28 January 2011.

The report contains 61 recommendations relating to issues, including:
- food safety elements (that is, the safe food handling and behaviours after the food is purchased)
- nutrition policy
- ingredient list
- nutrition information panel
- nutrition, health and related claims
- alcohol
- labelling of genetically modified foods
- irradiation and nanotechnology
- industry-initiated approaches
- government-mandated interventions
- presentation
- text
- images
- front-of-pack labelling
- information technology
- food labelling bureau

The process for consideration of these recommendations is complex and the final responses to the recommendations by the Commonwealth, Australian States and Territories and New Zealand, will be considered by the Ministerial Council in December 2011.

More information, including the final report and copies of public submissions and public consultation meeting records is available at www.foodlabellingreview.gov.au.

Food Safety Week 2011

Australian Food Safety Week 2011 will be held 7 to 13 November 2011 and will target vulnerable populations. This includes the very young, the elderly; pregnant women, their unborn and newborn children; and people of all ages who are in poor health or who have weakened immune systems.

The aim will be to increase awareness of the problems associated with certain risky foods that can potentially be life threatening or cause significant harm. During Food Safety Week safe food preparation and handling practices will be highlighted.

Interested organisations, especially local governments, are invited by the Food Safety Information Council (FSIC) to join in promoting good food safety practices during Australian Food Safety Week this year.

Further information on Food Safety Week is available on the FSIC website at www.foodsafety.asn.au/foodsaftyweek.
Caffeinated energy drinks

There have been increasing reports of health incidents involving consumption of formulated caffeinated energy drinks (CEDs), particularly by young people, leading to increasing concerns from health and education professionals and the community regarding these products. These concerns relate not only to composition and caffeine content, but also to availability, the number of products available and marketing of these drinks.

In addition, there is the issue of potential for harm caused by mixing CEDs with alcohol, whether they are mixed at the bar or purchased as pre-mixed drinks (i.e. ready to drink).

In 2001, when the first energy drink of this type was produced, a Standard was introduced for the regulation of caffeinated energy drinks. In 2003, with more products on the market, the Ministerial Council issued a Policy Guideline.

Since 2003, the presence of caffeine in the food supply has changed substantially and the number of products containing caffeine has increased, as has, in some cases, the level of caffeine in products.

In response to concerns by health professionals and the community, Australian and New Zealand Ministers responsible for the regulation of food and beverages met in Canberra on 6 May 2011 and ordered a comprehensive review of the Policy Guideline on the Addition of Caffeine to Foods, to address the ongoing health concerns associated with CEDs.

The Ministerial Council is awaiting advice from the Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs on how it plans to respond to the issue of mixing alcohol with caffeinated energy drinks.

**NSW Fast choices: Implementing the nutrition information requirements**

From 1 February 2012, larger NSW food businesses selling ‘standard menu items’ must display nutrition information at the point of sale.

The new laws apply to ‘standard food outlets’, ie. ones that sell ‘standard food items’, which are defined as being:
- ready-to-eat foods (not pre-packaged),
- sold in servings that are standardised for portion size and content,
- shown on a menu or displayed with a price or label, and
- sold at more than one food outlet.

A standard food outlet only needs to comply with these new laws if they have 20 or more locations in NSW (or 50 or more locations nationally). Outlets that are not required to comply with the new law may choose to comply voluntarily.

Examples of typical standard food outlets include:
- quick service restaurants
- pizza chains
- coffee chains
- bakery chains
- ice-cream chains
- doughnut chains
- juice bar chains
- supermarket chains

The outlets are required to display the average energy content of the food item as well as the average adult daily energy intake (ie 8700kJ). The information must be displayed on printed and electronic menus for particular types of food items.

Food Safety Resources |
| Description |
| Looking after our Kids | A video and handbook resource for school principals, parent bodies, canteen managers, canteen assistants and volunteers to help them understand and comply with the Food Safety Standards. |
| Looking after Delivered Meals | A video and handbook resource designed to help delivered meal organisations comply with the national Food Safety Standards. By following the practices shown in the video and handbook, everyone involved with preparing or delivering the meals will be able to demonstrate that they handle food safely. |

The above Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) publications can be accessed at the FSANZ website www.foodstandards.gov.au/scienceandeducation/learningcentre/foodsafetyproducts.

A number of Queensland Health food safety resources can also be accessed at the Queensland Health food safety website www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety.

Japanese earthquake

Radioactive material was released into the environment from damaged Japanese nuclear power plants following the Japanese earthquake in March. Measurements of radionuclide concentrations in food took place and the Japanese authorities confirmed the presence of radioactivity in some vegetables and milk. Some of the initial food monitoring results also detected radioactive iodine in concentrations above the Japanese regulatory limits.

There are internationally agreed Codex Guideline Levels (GLs) for radionuclide levels in internationally traded food following a nuclear or radiological emergency. The GLs state that, ‘as far as generic radiological protection of food consumers is concerned, when radionuclide levels in food do not exceed the corresponding GL, the food should be considered as safe for human consumption. When the GLs are exceeded, national governments shall decide whether and under what circumstances the food should be distributed within their territory or jurisdiction’. According to the United Nations organisations that closely monitored the situation, the radiation levels did not present health or transportation safety hazards.

In response to the nuclear accident, Japanese authorities instituted monitoring of food products and restricted the consumption and distribution of some products in certain prefectures, or areas found to contain radionuclides exceeding Japan’s provisional regulation value.

Many countries have implemented food control measures to mirror actions taken within Japan. Some countries have indicated they now require documentation verifying the safety of products and/or the prefecture of origin of the food.

Mailing list

If you have changed your email address or no longer wish to receive our newsletter, please email the Food Safety Policy and Regulation Unit via email foodsafety@health.qld.gov.au, phone (07) 3328 9310 or fax (07) 3328 9354.