Food Safety Week 2009

The Food Safety Information Council (FSIC) conducts a national Food Safety Week each year using a different theme, to raise awareness of important food safety issues. This year, Food Safety Week is being held from 9-15 November, with the theme ‘Safe Food – smart and great value’.

This theme is based on the fact that an increasing number of Australians are cooking and entertaining at home. We are seeking good value in shopping for our food products and smart shopping, storing and cooking will be highlighted.

Further information on Food Safety Week, including other activities conducted by the FSIC and fact sheets and access to the various media announcements, can be found at www.foodsafety.asn.au.

Seafood Safety Scheme

As of 1 July 2009, there is no longer a requirement to hold a buyer’s licence under the Fisheries legislation. There is now a new requirement for specified food businesses to be accredited under a new Seafood scheme. These food businesses have until 1 January 2010 to become accredited with Safe Food Production Queensland (SFPQ), which is the agency responsible for the implementation of this Scheme.

Currently, under section 48(2)(a) of the Food Act 2006 (the Act), food businesses who hold accreditation under the Food Production (Safety) Act 2000 are not licensable food businesses. Once SFPQ has completed the phase-in period, some food businesses currently licensed under the Act may no longer require that licence.

Food businesses that are solely involved in retail activities (only selling seafood to the consumer for personal consumption) do not require accreditation but may be a licensable food business and should contact their local government.

For more information about the Seafood Safety Scheme, visit the SFPQ website www.safefood.qld.gov.au ph. 1800 300 815, or email info@safefood.qld.gov.au.
Christmas food safety tips

Christmas is a time of celebration with family and friends and usually involves preparation of a hot or cold lunch or dinner feast at home. Christmas should be an enjoyable and memorable part of the year. Take note of the following advice and food safety tips to help ensure your Christmas and holiday period are memorable for the right reasons.

The Christmas period in Australia is in the middle of summer. The risk of food poisoning increases with the hot weather and these warm temperatures provide the perfect breeding ground for bacteria.

The average home kitchen is not designed for preparing food for large numbers of people:

- Preparation of large amounts of food will limit the amount of kitchen space required to prepare this quantity of food and this will increase the chance of cross-contamination
- Storage of large amounts of food in the refrigerator often means there is limited room for circulation of the cool air, which may affect the adequate temperature control of the food
- Hot foods placed in the refrigerator to cool, may increase the temperature until the food has cooled, which may affect adequate temperature control of the food.

Undertaking good food safety practices:

Keep food out of the temperature danger zone (5°C – 60°C)

- Prepare foods as close as possible to eating time. Before preparing food for Christmas, make sure there is enough space in the refrigerator to keep cold food at 5°C or lower. If you need extra space, remove non-potentially hazardous foods such as soft drink and alcoholic drinks and keep in an esky with ice.
- It is okay to defrost the turkey on the bench, but to ensure bacteria are killed, make sure it is cooked all the way through to the centre and in the thickest part of the meat. A meat thermometer is the most effective way to check the temperature has reached 75°C. Stuffing slows down cooking and cooling, so it is best to cook it separately.
- If you cook large amounts of food in advance, divide it into smaller portions or put it in shallow containers, cover and place in the refrigerator or freezer, ensuring that there is good air circulation around the containers.
- Refrigerate leftovers immediately after the meal and use within 2-3 days.
- With proper handling, Christmas ham will keep safe for several weeks. It should be removed from the plastic wrap and covered with a clean cloth soaked with water and vinegar. Follow any instructions on the packaging and store under 5°C.

Minimise the risk of cross-contamination

- Ensure you maintain good hygiene at all times when handling food.
- Ensure you regularly wash your hands, particularly after handling raw meat or other potentially hazardous foods.
- Use different cutting boards and bench surfaces for potentially hazardous foods and other foods, to prevent cross-contamination.

*Please feel free to disseminate this information to consumers in your food business or reproduce in any newsletters or other publications that are disseminated to members of the public.*
**Food safety programs and auditing requirements**

**Standard 3.3.1 - Food Safety Programs for Food Service to Vulnerable Persons**

Standard 3.3.1 commenced in Queensland on 3 October 2009. The Standard requires food businesses that process or serve potentially hazardous to six or more vulnerable persons, to implement a documented and audited food safety program.

Refer to *food industry fact sheet 23. Food safety programs for vulnerable persons*, located at [www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety), for general information on food safety programs for vulnerable persons, including examples of the types of food businesses required to have a food safety program.

### Submitting a food safety program to the local government for accreditation

Following development of the food safety program (FSP), the food business is required to submit a copy of the program to their local government environmental health section. The local government may also require the food business to have an assessment of the food safety program undertaken by an approved auditor, to provide advice as to whether the food safety program complies with the requirements under the *Food Act 2006* (the Act). The auditor will provide written notice of this advice and the written advice must be included with the application for accreditation of the food safety program.


### Approval as an auditor - tools and resources


Approval will not be granted unless you fulfill each of the requirements outlined in the ‘*Application guide for approval as a food safety auditor under the Food Act 2006*’. It is important that you read this guide thoroughly and ensure that you include all the relevant documentation, including copies of proof of identity documents and qualifications. All attachments must be certified.


These resources include forms for surrender and replacement of approval, application for change in details and application for amendment of conditions of approval.

The following templates are also provided, for use in conducting and reporting on audits:

1. **Notice of written advice - consideration for accreditation of food safety program**
   
   This template is to be used when undertaking an assessment of a FSP for the purpose of providing written advice to the local government, which they must consider when deciding to accredit the FSP.

2. **Food safety audit report**

   This template is to be used when completing a compliance or nonconformance audit, to be submitted to the holder of the program and the accrediting body, upon completion of the audit.
Hot topics

Mandatory fortification of bread and bread-making flour under the Food Standards Code

Folic Acid
From 13 September 2009, a requirement was introduced for folic acid, a form of the B vitamin folate, to be added to bread-making flour in Australia, to reduce the risk of babies being born with birth defects such as spina bifida.

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommends that women who are pregnant, or considering becoming pregnant, should take a folic acid supplement at least one month before and three months after conception to reduce the risk of birth defects. Up to half of pregnancies in Australia are unplanned, so while some women may be aware of the need to take supplements, this may not occur at the right time.

Mandatory folic acid addition to flour has been used safely in the United States and Canada for over 10 years where rates of spina bifida have significantly decreased. Australian health authorities will be monitoring the effects of the increased levels of folic acid in the food supply.

Note that consumption of bread fortified with folic acid does not negate the need for women who are pregnant or considering being pregnant, to take folic acid supplements.

Iodine
From 9 October 2009, a requirement was introduced for the essential nutrient iodine to be added to bread in Australia, through the addition of iodised salt, to help address the re-emergence of iodine deficiency across most of the population.

Iodine is essential for the healthy function of the thyroid gland to help it produce hormones that regulate metabolism, including the regulation of body temperature. Most people need only a small amount a day but we need iodine regularly because we cannot store large amounts in the body.

Iodine is particularly important for the normal development of a baby’s brain and nervous system, especially during pregnancy and in the first 2-3 years of life. Not having enough iodine during pregnancy and early childhood can cause developmental delay and lead to reductions in mental performance. This damage prior to 2-3 years of age is irreversible.

Iodine can be found in many foods, but much of the Australian and New Zealand food supply is low in iodine as our ancient soils lack this important nutrient. In the past some of our iodine came from iodised table salt but now many of us are correctly following healthy eating recommendations not to add salt at the table or when cooking. This has contributed to widespread iodine deficiency throughout the population.
ATTENTION: Reminder about important food business responsibilities

Suspected intentional contamination of food (food tampering) incidents

Intentional contamination is a deliberate action to introduce something into a product, often with the intention to do harm to the consumer, the company or both. This type of crime can be committed in food processing, food storage, food service and food retail operations by a wide variety of people for different reasons. A person who carries out such an act commits a crime and can be charged by the police under the Criminal Code Act 1899.

Provisions of the Act require food businesses to notify Queensland Health when a reasonable suspicion has been formed that food at their premises has been intentionally contaminated. The provision also requires the food business to follow all directions given by Queensland Health in relation to identifying the source of the contamination and preventing or minimising the risk to public health or safety from potentially contaminated food.

Notification should be made by calling 13HEALTH (13 432 584). Refer to the Suspected intentional contamination of food – Industry Protocol located at www.health.qld.gov.au/industry/contamination/, for assistance in identifying and responding to incidents of suspected intentional contamination of food.

Food recalls

Food Safety Standard 3.2.2(12) of the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code requires food manufacturers, wholesalers and importers to have a system in place to ensure the recall of unsafe food.

A recall system is the procedure that a food business uses to ensure food that has been manufactured, imported or distributed in Australia can be retrieved from the food supply chain if that food is found to be unsafe.

Reasons for the recall could include contamination by pathogenic bacteria or the presence of chemicals or foreign matter that could cause physical harm to a person consuming the food.

Queensland Health co-ordinates all food recalls in Queensland and if food businesses are in doubt as to whether a recall is necessary, they should contact the Principal Environmental Health Officer (PEHO) and/or Director, Food Safety Policy and Regulation (FSPR) Unit, Queensland Health.

The PEHO is the nominated Food Recall Co-ordinator for Queensland and must be made aware of all food recalls in Queensland so that Queensland Health can liaise with Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) and the company, to ensure co-ordination of the recall in accordance with the agreed recall protocol. Contact details for the FSPR are located on page 9 of this newsletter.

FSANZ has developed a protocol to assist food businesses in developing a food recall system. The ‘Food Industry Recall Protocol’ can be found at: www.foodstandards.gov.au/foodmatters/food recalls/foodindustryrecallpr1819.cfm.
Information for Environmental Health Officers

Local Government secure site

As you may be aware, the Local Government secure site, located at [www.health.qld.gov.au/eholocalgov](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/eholocalgov), now includes a component on the Food Act 2006. Access to this site is restricted to local government environmental health officers with a username and password. A registration form to obtain a username and password for access the website, and where to submit the form, is available on the homepage.

The Food Act 2006 component contains all resources included in the Local Government resource manual, including guidelines, forms, templates and other environmental health resources. It also includes food safety program implementation working group agenda papers and outcome notes, as well as copies of all previous correspondence to local government (circulars/letters) and copies of the Food Under Wraps newsletters.

The website is updated regularly, to ensure that local government environmental health officers are always equipped with information and guidance to effectively enforce the provisions of the Food Act 2006.

The Council of Australian Governments review of food labelling law and policy

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council (the Ministerial Council) have agreed to undertake a comprehensive review of food labelling law and policy which will consider options to reduce the regulatory burden in food labelling without compromising public health and safety.

Some of the factors that were considered in requesting the review were that:

- There is a finite amount of information on labels that people can absorb. Poorly designed labels can confuse rather than assist consumers. There is also a finite amount of information that can reasonably be included on food packaging.
- At present, each request for change to food labelling standards is assessed on a case by case basis. There is no process for examining the cumulative burden and cost of incrementally increasing labelling requirements.
- There is limited scope within the food regulatory system for innovative approaches to labelling issues. Food regulators currently have a very limited range of enforcement tools which makes proportionate enforcement of labelling requirements difficult to achieve.
- A stated objective of food laws is to prevent misleading or deceptive conduct in relation to food. The prevention of misleading or deceptive conduct is also an objective of general consumer protection laws. There is overlap between these two areas of law.
- Both business and consumer stakeholders have voiced concern about variation in enforcement of food labelling laws across jurisdictions.
U.S. inadequate food safety regulation

U.S. President Barack Obama has announced that the U.S. government has an inspection rate of only 5% of the country’s food processing plants.

The president has created a Food Safety Working Group to advise on the laws and regulations that require change and to increase co-ordination between the dozen government agencies responsible for ensuring food safety among the U.S. food supply. President Obama described the 5% inspection rate as ‘unacceptable’ and another role of the Working Group is to ensure that the food safety laws are enforced. He is supportive of increasing the number of government inspections, in order to achieve this goal.

Australia has a strong partnership between the different levels of government, consumers and industry to ensure an effective and consistent food regulatory system which maintains a high level of food safety. This system involves the development and implementation of food policy, food standard setting, enforcement and surveillance.


### New articles and publications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Safety Resource</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food Safety Program guidance documents and fact sheets</td>
<td>Development tools for food safety programs are available via <a href="http://www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety">www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety</a> for retail and catering and retail premises, private hospitals and childcare facilities. Food industry fact sheets <em>Food safety programs for caterers, Food safety programs for vulnerable populations, Choosing to have a food safety program and Complying with a food safety program</em> are also available to provide further guidance to relevant food businesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Safety Programs: Administration, accreditation, auditing and enforcement</td>
<td>A document designed to provide Queensland Health, Queensland local governments, approved regulatory food safety auditors and licensees of food businesses with information relating to processes and requirements for the auditing of food safety programs including noncompliances, audit reports, audit frequency and conducting nonconformance audits, where necessary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Food reforms at a glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The requirement</th>
<th>Where we are at</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Food Standards Code | Food Safety Programs | Standard 3.3.1 – Food Safety Programs for Food Service to Vulnerable Persons, commenced in Queensland on 3 October 2009. The Standard requires food businesses that process or serve potentially hazardous to six or more vulnerable persons, to implement a documented and audited food safety program.  
| **Food Act 2006** | | |
| **Food Act 2006** | - Food Safety Programs | Defined food businesses are required to have a food safety program under the **Food Act 2006**.  
| **Food Regulation 2006** | Commenced on 1 July 2006 | An exemption is provided for on-site caterers from having a food safety program if catering is provided on not more than 11 occasions in a 12 month period, for not more than 199 persons on each occasion. |
| **Primary Produce** | | |
| **Food Production (Safety) Act 2000** | Major provisions became law in Queensland as of 25 October 2000  
Introduction of the Seafood Safety Scheme, which implements Standard 4.2.1 | Legislation that governs primary produce, for which a food safety scheme applies, enforced by Safe Food Production Queensland (SFPQ).  
Further details are included on page 6 of this newsletter.  
For more information contact SFPQ on 1800 300 815. |
**Upcoming events...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>Where</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Food Safety Week (see page 1)</td>
<td>Food Safety Information Council email <a href="mailto:foodsafety@ozemail.com">foodsafety@ozemail.com</a></td>
<td>9-15 November 2009</td>
<td>Nationwide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Health Australia 2009 35th National conference–Towards sustainability - Time to deliver</td>
<td>EHA National Secretariat, PO Box 776, Heathcote Vic 3523 Email: <a href="mailto:adam@conferencemanagement.com.au">adam@conferencemanagement.com.au</a></td>
<td>11-13 November 2009</td>
<td>Wrest Point, 410 Sandy Bay Rd, Sandy Bay Tas 7005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Irresistible Gluten Free Food Show</td>
<td>Ph. (03) 9261 4500 or email <a href="mailto:glutenfree@divexhibitions.com.au">glutenfree@divexhibitions.com.au</a></td>
<td>14-15 November 2009</td>
<td>Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mailing list**

Join for free or change your details

Fax or post this form to the Food Safety Policy & Regulation Unit with the following details (see contact details below):

- Please provide me with an **electronic** copy of future newsletters (provide details and **email address**).
- Please **correct** my contact details as shown below.
- I no longer wish to receive the newsletter, please **remove** my contact details, as shown below.

**Name:** ____________________________________________

**Address:** __________________________________________

**Suburb:** ___________________________________________ **Postcode:** _____________

**Company:** __________________________________________ **Phone No.:** _____________

**Email Address:** _____________________________________

To contact the **Food Safety Policy & Regulation Unit**

Phone: (07) 3328 9310; Fax: (07) 3328 9354;

Mail: PO Box 2368, Fortitude Valley Qld 4006; or email foodsafety@health.qld.gov.au.

Please visit the Queensland Health food safety website at: www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety.