New Queensland Health food safety website

The Queensland Health food safety website has recently been redeveloped and is situated at a new website address. The address for the food safety website is www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety.

The new food safety website is more user-friendly and makes accessing information on a specific topic easier, through the inclusion of individual pages for the different areas of food safety and food legislation. A full list of the Queensland Health food safety resources also remains on the website homepage if you wish to search for a specific document.

Separate pages exist for each of the following areas:

- Our role and key partners in food safety:
  - Environmental Health Branch (Food Safety Policy and Regulation Unit)
  - Public Health Units (Queensland Health)
  - Our key partners.
- Food safety legislation
  - Food Act 2006:
    - Food business responsibilities
    - Food tampering
    - Food business licences
    - Food safety supervisors
    - Food safety programs
    - Food safety auditors.
- Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code:
  - Food labelling, composition and advertising
  - Food safety and hygiene
  - Food recalls
  - Food-borne illness
  - Food service to vulnerable populations.
- Information for consumers and specific industry groups:
  - Non-profit organisations
  - Mobile food premises
  - Commercial vessels
  - Information for consumers.
- Information papers and reports:
  - Food Safety Update newsletters
  - OzFoodNet resources.
- Links.
Safe Food Handling in Australian Food Businesses

In 2000-2001, the National Food Handling Benchmark Survey was undertaken to research food handling practices in Australian food businesses. The research was conducted prior to the implementation of Chapter 3 Food Safety Standards of the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code.

In 2007, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) undertook a subsequent national food handling survey and published the results in the 2007 National Food Handling Survey Final Report (the 2007 survey).

The 2007 survey involved an evaluation of the effectiveness of Chapter 3 Food Safety Standards in protecting public health and safety.

The recently released report Safe Food Handling in Australian Food Businesses –Knowledge and Practices: An Interpretive Summary of the 2007 and 2001 National Food Handling Surveys (the Interpretive Summary), shows that food businesses have significantly improved their safe food handling knowledge and practices since the Benchmark Survey in 2001.

Key survey findings
Key areas where food handling practices improved since the 2001 survey include:

- Correct temperature control of potentially hazardous foods
- Protection of food from contamination
- Effective cleaning and sanitising
- Personal hygiene.

The survey also highlighted several areas where improvements could be made. These areas include:

- Better knowledge of correct temperatures to store potentially hazardous foods, checking temperatures of received foods and correct cooling of hot foods
- Better supervision of self-service food
- Using correct procedures when chemically sanitising equipment and utensils
- Education for staff on correct hand washing techniques and better management of staff illness
- Better general cleanliness of food businesses, particularly in cooking areas, dry good storage areas and cool rooms
- Having a food recall plan as required by the Food Safety Standards.

The survey also showed that businesses that provided training to their staff generally had higher levels of knowledge about food safety than those businesses that did not provide any staff training.

Businesses that have a food safety management system where the business identifies, documents, and monitors how they intend to meet their obligations under the Food Safety Standards have significantly improved their safe food handling knowledge and practices leading to consequent improvements in overall food safety and public health.

Food businesses are encouraged to use this information to review their food handling practices. Further advice regarding safe food handling practices may be obtained from your local government environmental health officer.

For further details regarding the survey’s outcomes, a copy of the report can be accessed from the FSANZ website at: http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/scienceandeducation/publications/evaluationreportseries/2007nationalfoodhand4116.cfm by clicking on the Interpretive Summary (pdf) link.
Auditor approvals

Queensland Health has recently released Food Industry Fact Sheet 17 ‘Becoming an approved auditor’ (referenced in our last newsletter) and which can be accessed at http://www.health.qld.gov.au/ph/documents/ehu/food_auditor_fs.pdf.

This fact sheet provides advice to persons who are considering applying for approval as an auditor under the Food Act 2006 (the Act).

Topics you may find helpful include the criteria required to become a food safety auditor and the application and approval process to become an auditor.

Application forms are available at the Queensland Health food safety website above.

Prospective auditors are urged to ensure they have read, understood and agreed to comply with the relevant legislation and the Code of Conduct as there is a requirement to comply as part of the conditions of approval, if approved as an auditor under the Act. A copy of the Code of Conduct can be accessed from the Queensland Health food safety website at: http://www.health.qld.gov.au/ph/documents/ehu/food_codeconduct.pdf.

The Code of Conduct describes the principles and procedures to be followed by approved auditors to ensure food safety program assessment and auditing services are delivered with integrity, professionalism, accountability and diligence when conducting audits of food businesses under the Act.

Mutual Recognition Principle

It is important that local governments and food businesses with an accredited food safety program are aware of the ‘mutual recognition principle’.

In accordance with the Mutual Recognition (Queensland) Act 1992 a person who is registered/approved as a food safety auditor by an Australian State/Territory is entitled after notifying Queensland Health for the equivalent occupation—

(a) to be registered in the second State for the equivalent occupation; and
(b) pending such registration, to carry on the equivalent occupation in the second State.

That is, a person who is registered/approved as a food safety auditor in another Australian State/Territory is entitled to be approved as a food safety auditor in Queensland without undergoing further assessment. This is called the ‘mutual recognition principle’.

A person who seeks approval as an auditor under the ‘mutual recognition principle’ is taken to be approved as an auditor from the date on which the application was lodged, and therefore can perform the functions of an auditor under the Food Act 2006 from the date on which they lodge their application.

However, an auditor who has lodged an application for approval as an auditor to Queensland Health under the ‘mutual recognition principle’ will not be in the register of approved auditors until their application is successful and they have been issued with an approval as an auditor by Queensland Health.

If a food business or local government is in doubt as to whether an auditor is approved to conduct audits under the Food Act 2006, please contact the Food Safety Policy and Regulation Unit Queensland Health on ph. 3328 9310.

Hot topics

Hot stuff


Food safety and suitability – what do we mean by ‘suitability’?
Most people know what is meant by food safety, but the meaning of the term ‘suitability’ can be misunderstood. Suitability is often explained as labelling and composition, but in reality only some of the attributes it describes can be explained this way.

New Zealand Food Safety Authority defines suitability as ‘product attributes that include aesthetic characteristics or defects, composition and labelling that are not related to food safety’.

Non-safety related attributes include many of the features of a product that make it fit for purpose i.e. those characteristics that contribute to reasonable consumer expectations as well as characteristics whose presence would be offensive or unexpected e.g. decomposition, unpleasant offensive flavour, texture or appearance.

The terms unsafe food and unsuitable food are defined in the Food Act 2006 however this table may help clarify which labelling and compositional requirements of food are safety or suitability-related.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labelling requirements</th>
<th>Compositional requirements</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety-related</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• food identification requirements, including the batch code and suppliers name and address</td>
<td>• maximum levels of contaminants and toxins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• any warning or advisory statements that may apply</td>
<td>• microbiological limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• declaration of specific food allergens</td>
<td>• maximum permitted levels of food additives, vitamins and minerals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• use by dates</td>
<td>• prohibited or restricted plant and fungi, novel foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• direction for use and storage that affect health and safety.</td>
<td>• nutrients in special purpose foods such as infant formula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suitability-related</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• declaration of ingredients</td>
<td>• Minimum compositional requirements for defined or standardised foods such as chocolate, peanut butter, ice cream, jam, fruit juice, beer, wine and spirits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• best before date marks</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• characterising ingredient (%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• nutrition labelling – nutrition information panels and nutrition claims</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• wording, graphics and branding placed on labels to promote products may also affect suitability (also subject to the Fair Trading Act).</td>
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Information for Environmental Health Officers

Development of a food business rating system update

Queensland Health is currently investigating food business rating systems implemented in Australia and overseas. This emerging issue is being discussed at a national level to determine if there is a system that can be adopted, providing national consistency. As part of this national consideration, New South Wales is currently trialling “Scores on Doors”. Queensland Health will be monitoring the success of this trial.

As a result of the work occurring Nationally, It is suggested that local governments not commence the development and/or implementation of food business rating system/s until further advice is received from Queensland Health. This will ensure that Queensland remains in line with national requirements and will provide consistency and continuity for food businesses in Queensland and across Australia.

Please contact Food Safety Policy and Regulation on (07) 3328 9310 or foodsafety@health.qld.gov.au if you would like to be kept updated on this important issue.

International news

Rock lobster exports – Australia lucks out

Until very recently China bought more than 90 per cent of Tasmania’s rock lobster catch. Apparently after years of allowing Australia to export rock lobster to China through Hong Kong, thus avoiding Chinese import tariffs, China has had enough and wants to teach Australia a lesson by slapping a ban on all Australian rock lobster imports. China was the biggest market for the $500 million rock lobster export industry. This news clearly is devastating for the industry and crisis talks around the country are under way in South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia. So, support the industry where possible and buy rock lobsters for Christmas lunch.


Apple exports - New Zealand lucks in

The World Trade Organisation has ordered Canberra to change restrictions on imports of New Zealand apples. For the first time since 1921, New Zealand apples will soon be available on our shelves. Australian fruit growers however, are not happy about importing apples from a country that has fire blight, a disease that affects apples. New Zealand on the other hand is delighted as the export market to Australia could be worth $36 million a year.

### Food Safety Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Safety Resources</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FSP Master</td>
<td>An online tool that assists food businesses in developing a food safety program tailored to their requirements by answering simple questions about their food business using drop-down menus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditor newsletter Issue 1 – June 2010</td>
<td>This newsletter provides information to auditors approved under the <em>Food Act 2006</em>, particularly in relation to new or topical issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer fact sheet 4 – Food safety when outdoors</td>
<td>This fact sheet provides general food safety information for persons eating outdoors and may be useful when organising or attending barbeques, picnics, camping, hiking, fishing and boating activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer fact sheet 5 – The facts about food irradiation</td>
<td>Irradiation of food involves exposing the food to a radiation field. Radiation is a source of ionising energy and is permitted in certain forms under the Food Standards Code. Learn why food is irradiated, what the process of irradiation is and how it affects your food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer fact sheet 6 – What to do if you suspect a food business is operating without a licence</td>
<td>The primary reason for licensing requirements under the <em>Food Act 2006</em> is to ensure that a food business is equipped to produce safe and suitable food. This fact sheet provides information on food licences and what you can do to ensure food operators comply with the <em>Food Act 2006</em>.</td>
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### Food Regulation 2006 amendment

An amendment to the *Food Regulation 2006* (the Regulation) has been gazetted requiring licensed food businesses captured by Standard 3.3.1 – *Food safety programs for food service to vulnerable persons* to have an accredited food safety program from 1 November 2010.

The amendment defines food businesses prescribed under section 99(1)(e) of the *Food Act 2006*. Whilst the definitions included in the Regulation do not mirror those in Standard 3.3.1, the Regulation captures the intended food businesses. Please note that the Regulation must be read in its entirety including the dictionary to obtain the overall intent.


Food safety week debunks myths

Myths around food safety are alive and well in the community. During Australian Food Safety Week 2010 which was held from 8 – 14 November, Queensland Health urged residents to make food safety a top priority and took the opportunity to debunk some of the common food safety myths.

“The Food Safety Information Council estimates a fifth of the 5.4 million cases of food poisoning in Australia each year are caused by poor hygiene, and below standard food handling and storage in the home”.

Some myths include:

**MYTH: If food looks and smells OK, it’s safe to eat.  Mastery:** if avoiding food poisoning was as simple as looking and smelling, there would be far fewer cases than the estimated 5.4 million cases each year in Australia.

**MYTH: Cooked food must be cool before being placed into a refrigerator.  Mastery:** food poisoning bacteria multiply very rapidly in moist foods such as rice and casserole, when left to cool at room temperature for too long. Some bacteria produce food poisoning toxins that cannot be made safe by reheating or recooking the food. If hot food is to be cooled, cool it as quickly as possible by placing it in a refrigerator once it has stopped steaming.

**MYTH: You can’t eat rare meat.  Mastery:** bacteria find it hard to enter fresh raw meat and are normally only on the outside, which means most meats are safe to eat if they are cooked on the outside and rare on the inside. HOWEVER, mincing mixes bacteria into the food and products such as burger patties, sausages, meat loaf and rolled and stuffed meats **must** be cooked completely through the centre to be safe. Poultry must always be cooked very thoroughly.

**MYTH: Raw eggs are always safe.  Mastery:** eggs are a highly nutritious food that is generally safe to eat. However, cracked or dirty eggs have been associated with many food poisoning outbreaks and should not be used. Young children, the elderly and anyone who is in poor health should avoid eating raw or partly cooked egg, including cake batter and things such as home-made egg nog.


If you would like to be involved with Food safety week next year or would like more information contact Juliana Madden, Food Safety Information Council, 0417 491 139, foodsafety@ozemail.com.au.

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### Upcoming events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>Where</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Health Risk Management Workshop</td>
<td>Environmental Health Australia Ph. (07) 3000 2299 Email: <a href="mailto:qld@eh.org.au">qld@eh.org.au</a></td>
<td>18 &amp; 19 January 2011</td>
<td>Room Q2.08 QUT Kelvin Grove Campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Food Safety Training Course</td>
<td>Environmental Health Australia Ph. (07) 3000 2299 Email: <a href="mailto:qld@eh.org.au">qld@eh.org.au</a></td>
<td>21-23 February 2011 (2.5 days)</td>
<td>Brisbane (venue to be confirmed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Health Workshop</td>
<td>Environmental Health Australia Ph. (07) 3000 2299 Email: <a href="mailto:qld@eh.org.au">qld@eh.org.au</a></td>
<td>March (2 days) (date to be confirmed)</td>
<td>Brisbane (venue to be confirmed)</td>
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</table>
Please note the Gold Coast Public Health Unit has a new location. At present however, the old phone number is still in use (07) 5509 7222.

Mailing list
join for free or change your details

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