

 West Lothian Council	Environmental Health		SUBJECT: THE USE AND CARE OF MICROWAVE OVENS
	4	Food Safety/Food Hygiene	NUMBER: FH12
Reviewed: 24/12/2007		Health & Safety	
		Public Health	
STATUS: TRADE ADVICE		Pollution Control	
		Pest Control/Dog Warden	

Information Sheet FH12

The Use and Care of Microwave Ovens

Introduction

The microwave oven can be a useful asset in any kitchen, particularly for melting ingredients, for thawing and for reheating food. If it is used for cooking there can be a noticeable difference in flavour for some dishes, compared to conventional cooking e.g. cakes and fish. This is because the cooking process is different.

Safe use of Microwave Ovens

The following points should be considered when using a microwave oven:

- The minimum temperatures for safe food are the same as for other methods. These are 75° degrees Centigrade (°C) for freshly cooked food, and 82 degrees Centigrade (°C) for reheating.
- Microwave heating is sometimes uneven. To allow the heat to spread evenly through the food you will normally need to allow a “standing time” after the oven has stopped. This can vary with the oven, the food and other factors, but is commonly about one or two minutes. The instruction book will give more details.
- For prepacked food, follow the instructions for heating on the packet, including the standing time.
- The best method of checking if the food is hot enough is to check the temperature with a probe thermometer, about a minute or so after heating.
- If you have established a standard time for heating a particular item of food, you must have a reliable method for getting the quantity the same, e.g. always using one size container, filled to the same level.
- Take great care when using the microwave oven to thaw food. This is because the food does not heat evenly and can result in some parts of the food being cooked before the whole mass of food is thawed.
- Make sure that food is cooked or reheated in a microwaveable container. Some plastic type containers can cause chemicals to enter the food when microwaved. Look for ‘microwaveable’, ‘microwave proof’ or the microwave symbol on the container. Even the right type of container can become rough inside after repeated use and cannot be properly cleaned. Then it should be replaced.

- Only cling film suitable for use in the microwave should be used to cover food for heating. This information should be on the clingfilm box.
- Choose a commercial grade of equipment if you wish to make frequent use of the microwave oven. Domestic grade equipment will not stand up to heavy use and will be more easily damaged.
- Make sure that the inside of the oven is cleaned frequently with a suitable cleaner. Pay special attention to the area where the door shuts, as this will help to prevent leakage of microwaves.
- Although some foil containers can be used in some microwaves ovens, in general, metal should not be placed in the oven, as this will damage the machine during use. This includes metal dishes, metal spoons and gold/ silver decorated crockery.
- Always keep your microwave oven in good condition, repairing or replacing it when necessary. Like any other electrical equipment, it should be checked regularly. Microwaves can be dangerous; if you think the oven is faulty do not use it. Contact a service engineer to have it checked.

Further help

Remember it is your responsibility to ensure that the food served to your customers is safe. If you would like help, or need any further advice, then please contact us on 01506 282500 or environmentalhealth@westlothian.gov.uk