

 West Lothian Council	Environmental Health		SUBJECT: FOOD STORAGE CONTAINERS
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		Pest Control/Dog Warden	

Information Sheet FH23

Food Storage Containers

Introduction

Many Businesses need to put food into different containers or wrapping from that in which it has been supplied. It is important – and a legal requirement, that the containers or wrapping used must be safe for use with food.

This Guidance Note is to help you understand what materials can be used in contact with food, and how to make sure that all the boxes and bags etc. that you use are safe.

This guidance applies whenever you wrap food up, or put it into boxes, bags, or any other kind of container.

The Dangers

If you put food into a container which is made of a material which is not intended for food, then chemicals from that material may be absorbed into the food. Examples of this include chemicals from black dustbins, and metals from some enamel bowls. This can also happen if you use an unsuitable container in a microwave. Always check that dishes are safe for microwave use.

Sometimes, an unsafe material may be used to line a food container. For example, using newspapers or cardboard to line boxes used for cooked foods.

Also, it can be unsafe to use containers for the wrong type of food, such as using cardboard boxes which have held raw meat (fresh or frozen) to hold cooked meat, as this can pass on harmful bacteria.

Some plastic boxes are of a shape that makes effective cleaning and disinfection of them difficult and therefore should not be reused.

The Answers

The answer is to always **check** that the container, box, paper, or any other wrapping that you intend to use has been approved for use with food, before you use it. If it does not say somewhere that it is **safe for food use** – then assume that it isn't, and don't use it.

Also check that it is clean, free from sticky labels and in good condition to be safely used.

If you are in any doubt then please ask us and we will try to help.

Simple Rules

There are some simple rules you can follow to make this easier.

- Do not use any absorbent materials such as cardboard boxes for cooked foods.
- Do not use newspapers in contact with any food at all.
- Make sure that any re-usable container has been thoroughly cleaned, and disinfected if necessary, between uses.
- Any containers to be used for high risk or cooked foods should be cleaned and disinfected again immediately before use, to remove any harmful bacteria.
- Look for the 'Food-safe' symbol on containers, to confirm that they are safe for use with all types of food. It shows the outline of a glass and fork, and looks like this :-
- Plastic boxes are widely used in catering. It is good practice to use purpose made containers, designed for food use. These can be safely used many times.
- Some businesses re-use ice cream containers. This is not as good as buying new containers. They are safe to use, but they have a limited life before they become brittle. Pieces of plastic can then break off and get into food. Always check for condition every time they are used, and replace this type of box after a few uses with newer ones.
- If your business handles both raw and ready to eat foods then using storage containers of different colours, shapes, sizes etc will allow you to demonstrate that raw food storage containers are not being used for ready to eat foods.



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 280000 or environmentalhealth@westlothian.gov.uk

A wide range of Information Sheets are available to help businesses to understand and comply with the law. They cover topics such as cooked meats, defrosting, temperature control, cleaning materials, pest control, and others.