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|  West Lothian Council | Environmental Health | | SUBJECT: CHOOSING YOUR SUPPLIERS |
| | ✓ | Food Safety/Food Hygiene | NUMBER: FH07 |
| Reviewed: 29/06/15 | | Health & Safety | |
| | | Public Health | KEYWORDS: SUPPLIERS |
| STATUS: TRADE ADVICE Data label: Public | | Pollution Control | |
| | | Pest Control/Dog Warden | |

Information Sheet FH07

Choosing Your Suppliers

What's the problem?

As the Food Business Operator you are responsible for all the food operations within the business. This means that you must, as part of your food safety management system:

- Decide which food-handling steps are critical to ensuring food safety,
- Identify, implement and maintain suitable control measures to ensure food safety.

The first food-handling step in the majority of businesses is placing orders or purchasing directly from suppliers. The choice of suppliers is very important, as using a poor supplier may cause not only food safety problems, but many others too. Remember that it is on your raw ingredients that you build your business and reputation.

Listed below are a few of the possible food safety problems (hazards) that may arise if your choice of supplier is poor.

- Food with high levels of bacteria, because it has not been kept at the right temperature,
- Food contaminated by poor hygiene practices, pests, physical contamination, chemicals etc.
- Short dated or food beyond the expiry of its "Use By" date,
- Food with poor appearance, taste or smell,
- Rapid spoilage, and hence waste and a cost to your business,
- Incorrectly labelled food, including allergen information,
- Foods or ingredients which have been counterfeited, adulterated, substituted, or have no traceability and which may be dangerous.

As can be seen, it is essential that businesses choose their suppliers carefully.

Choosing Your Suppliers

Many of the problems outlined above can be overcome by using a few selected suppliers. You should choose those who have the knowledge, facilities and practices to ensure the safety of their food. Remember that they too have a responsibility to have a food safety management system.

As a minimum, you should ensure that your supplier is registered as a food business with their local council. If they are not registered, Environmental Health may not regularly inspect them. You may check that a company is registered by contacting your proposed supplier's local authority.

A number of ways of selecting a supplier with good standards include:

- Asking if the company has a food safety management system,
- Asking what part of their food safety management system ensures that they deliver a safe product. If their answer isn't what you would expect or desire, change your supplier.
- Finding out if a suitable pest control contract is in place, as deliveries might bring vermin into your business,
- Finding out what level of training is given to staff,
- If products require refrigeration, check to see if the company has the ability to keep food at a suitable temperature during transport,
- Arranging to visit the premises to see operations for yourself,
- Asking other businesses if they have had any problems with your proposed supplier.

One good way of finding out some of this information is to make up a questionnaire, that you request suppliers to complete.

Getting Food the Way You Need It

You may also request that the company supply food in a way that suits your business. Examples include:

- Deliveries made when staff are present and at the required interval,
- Deliveries in suitable quantities,
- Food packaged according to your needs,
- Specifying a minimum shelf life,
- Specifying the delivery temperature and the use of temperature controlled vehicles,
- Commercial documentation or invoices giving supplier name, contact details, approval mark etc. accompany the delivery.

Further help

Remember it is your responsibility to ensure that the ice food served to your customers is safe and wholesome. If you would like help, or need any further advice, then please contact us on 01506 280000 or environmentalhealth@westlothian.gov.uk