

Environmental Services Department



Food Safety Guidance for Food Handlers

Handling low risk food

I only handle boxes or cans. How can I affect the condition of the food?

Pre-packed food can be affected by a number of factors such as extremes of temperature, moisture, humidity, physical damage and pest activity and you should be aware of the correct conditions required for the particular food. For example certain products may require dry, well ventilated storage areas and to place them where they may become damp or where air circulation is restricted could result in mould formation and spoilage of the product.

Handling is also important especially with canned goods. When food is canned it is basically placed in a container from which the air has been removed and it is then heated to a temperature high enough to destroy dangerous food poisoning bacteria. Dropping or knocking cans can result in damage to the can seams or to the lip of the lid. Sometimes the damage will be obvious and can easily be spotted, however, even the smallest pin-prick of a hole can allow in air or contaminated water which can result in either mould formation within the can or even the build up of harmful food poisoning bacteria.

Sometimes the damage to cans is obvious and the can shows signs of leakage of the product. This usually takes the form of staining on the label or even of the outer cardboard case when, perhaps, the whole case has been subject to crushing. Any such cans should be removed from stock, placed in an area set aside for damaged goods and then destroyed.

Cans which show evidence of leakage must not be offered for sale

Cans which have been subject to accidental damage, perhaps due to a pallet collapse or impact from a truck, should be quarantined for careful examination by a trained person prior to either returning to stock or destruction.

Are there any other problems I may see?

As well as accidental damage there may be damage to products caused by pests or vermin. This will be indicated by signs of gnawing, holes in packaging or spillage/leakage of the product onto the floor or surrounding areas. The damage caused by these pests is not just limited to the packaging and to eating the product. Rats and mice constantly produce urine and droppings which contaminate both the product and the packaging. The droppings can be identified by their size and shape - small, black, spindle shaped in the case of mice, more rounded in the case of rats. In addition the urine can cause diseases in man if, for example,

you handle contaminated packaging and then eat food without thoroughly washing your hands.

Flour based products are also a target for pests, particularly flour moths. Infestation can occur if any spillage is allowed to accumulate or the area is not regularly and properly cleaned or where proper stock rotation is not practised and old stock remains on the shelves. Evidence of such an infestation could be indicated by cobwebs on surrounding areas or tiny moving insects within the product or the debris.

What action should I take if I see anything?

Where you notice any evidence of any kind of infestation it should be reported to management immediately so that they can take any necessary action.

Should low risk food handlers be trained in food hygiene?

The Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations require, amongst other things, that employers ensure persons working in a food business are supervised and instructed or trained in food hygiene matters and that the level of training should be appropriate to the work which they carry out. There are obviously many persons working in food businesses who do not have direct contact with the food, except in its wrapped or pre-packed state or during transport of the food. Whilst the general risk to the food is very low from this type of activity it is important that such workers have enough information to enable them to identify situations which could affect the state of the food and which may, if no action is taken, lead to spoilage of the food or render it unfit for human consumption.

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These notes are only intended as a simplified guide to Food Safety matters and do not cover all aspects in detail. If you require more specific advice on any aspect of Food, please contact:

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