

What is 'Safer food, better business'?

Introduction

In January 2006, EU legislation will require all food businesses to have a food safety management system in place based on hazard analysis critical control point (HACCP) principles. HACCP is a system that has been implemented with varying success in large food manufacturing companies across the world, and with greater difficulty in companies of a smaller size. It is a theoretically effective system, which takes a preventative, focused approach to managing food safety. However, it is also a resource heavy, time-consuming system full of complicated jargon, which requires technical expertise and decision-making to put into place.

Most food businesses are catering businesses, and most catering businesses are small. They are also inherently far more complex, diverse and dynamic in terms of input, processes and output than large food manufacturing companies. Therefore, imposing a food safety system designed for a minority of large manufacturers onto large numbers of small catering businesses which not only have a markedly different nature but also have fewer resources and technical expertise to cope with it, was in hind sight always a recipe for failure.

What is Safer Food, Better Business?

'Safer food, better business' or SFBB, is an innovative, jargon free, practical approach to food safety management that has been developed by the Food Standards Agency in partnership with over 50 local authorities and associated small caterers, experts and consultants. It is aimed at helping small catering businesses comply with the new Council Regulation 853/2004 that applies from 1 January 2006, which consolidates food hygiene legislation.

From 1 January 2006, food businesses will be required to put in place 'procedures' *based on the principles* of HACCP, in order to manage food safety and integrate these procedures with documentation and record keeping. This is not the same as HACCP systems. Within the Regulation there is flexibility, for example, so that record keeping should be *appropriate to the size and nature of the business*. Correctly implemented, SFBB enables small catering businesses to comply with the new legislation.

SFBB is a simple but effective approach that has integrated good hygienic practices and HACCP in a practical way but can still be mapped onto the 7 principles of HACCP.




How does it work?

SFBB consists of a series of safe method fact sheets, based on the FSA's Food Hygiene 4Cs campaign: Cooking, Chilling, Cleaning and avoiding Cross-contamination, which detail how key areas of food preparation and handling are dealt with safely. They combine the most important aspects of food safety and good hygienic practice on each sheet. A section to help the business manager deal with basic supervision and management issues is also included and a simple daily diary forms the record-keeping requirement.

The caterer works through the safe method fact-sheets and selects those that are applicable to them and then adopts them or adapts them to their own business as necessary. The selection of the relevant safe methods by the manager is their hazard analysis and when completed, the result unique to them.

An example of a trial safe method:



Safe method:

Individual cuts

Menu items:


It is essential to cook meat safely to kill harmful bacteria.

Safety point	Why?	How do you do this?			
Seal all the outside surfaces of the meat.	On whole cuts of meat (e.g. steaks), harmful bacteria are only found on the outside surface. Sealing the outside surfaces will kill these bacteria.	Type of cut	Time	Temp./setting	Equipment
Lower the temperature to continue cooking the meat.	To carry on cooking cuts until they are medium or well done, without burning them, you need to lower the temperature.	Type of cut	Time	Temp./setting	Method (e.g. shallow frying)
Don't let raw cuts touch/drip onto those already cooking.	Bacteria could spread from the raw cuts to the partially cooked food and stop it being safe to eat.	How do you keep food separate during cooking?			
You should only serve meat rare or medium if it is a whole cut. Poultry and minced products, such as burgers and sausages should be thoroughly cooked.	Poultry and minced products can contain bacteria all the way through, so they must be cooked thoroughly to make them safe.	This method applies to whole cuts of beef, lamb and pork. If you serve poultry or minced products, follow the safe methods for whole birds and processed meat.			


Check it	Why?	How do you do this?	If you do not do this, what do you do?
After you have sealed the meat, check to make sure all the surfaces have been totally sealed.	If the meat isn't totally sealed, harmful bacteria could still be on the outside.	Make sure that the colour has changed (see the picture on the back) across all the surfaces, including the edges.	

If you are not using the recommended check, you will need to prove your check. See over.


Raw cut of meat



Unsafe partially sealed cut



Safe sealed cut



What to do if things go wrong

- Continue the sealing process. If the equipment seems to be working and the cut is not fully sealed, cook it for longer and then check it again.
- Use another menu item. If it is not possible to cook the cut for longer, replace it with a similar menu item that is ready to serve.

How to stop this happening again

1. Repair or replace equipment and maintain it more regularly.
2. Check your cooking method. You might need to increase the time or temperature.
3. Always allow enough time to cook cuts of meat.
4. Improve staff training on cooking cuts of meat.
5. Improve staff supervision.

Write down what went wrong and what you did about it in your diary.

Prove it

You can use a temperature probe as a one-off test to prove that the method you follow gets the food to a safe temperature for a long enough time. See the Prove it method in the Management section. You should do this:

- if your method is different to what is recommended
- if you would like extra reassurance that the recommended method is working effectively in your business.

Date	Product	Time/temp required	Time/temp achieved

The safe method fact sheets provide a means of achieving critical safety points and wherever possible offer several alternatives and advice as to which means is preferable e.g. chilling hot foods quickly. By following these safe methods the business is following pre-approved/validated advice. However if the business wishes to use their own methods, they must develop their own safe method and prove that it is safe. Safe methods based on traditional catering craft skills are used wherever possible, for example, poultry being cooked when its juices run clear.

A diary is used to record relevant opening and closing checks, any problems that happened that day and most importantly what was done to rectify the problem. In practice the diary takes just a few minutes per day to complete unless something has gone wrong.

An example of the diary:

The diary form is a weekly log for SFBB. It is divided into two columns by a central vertical line with two binder holes. The left column contains entries for Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. The right column contains entries for Friday and Saturday. Each daily entry has a header 'Week commencing: / /' followed by a question 'Any problems or changes - what did you do?'. To the right of this question are two checkboxes: 'Opening checks' and 'Closing checks'. Below the question is a large 'Notes' field. At the bottom of each entry is a line for 'Name' and 'Signed'. The Saturday entry has a specific question: 'We have performed the following extra checks this week.' followed by a large text area for notes.

The philosophy behind it

It was decided the focus of SFBB should be on small catering and retail premises as there are some 400,000 in England with the bulk of these being very small. It is exactly these types of business that are often the ones that find food safety management difficult and where research shows significant public health gain can be made.

Although many Local Authorities have made progress with some small businesses, research showed that there were real challenges for many caterers and that the 7 step approach of traditional HACCP was not easily grasped or achievable. At the same time it was recognised that the catering industry was very diverse and a 'one size fits all' solution for food safety was not realistic in practice.

In designing SFBB, the Agency listened to a range of stakeholders and took notice of the flexibility in the Regulation, the UK administrations overarching policy of proportionate regulation and innovative work done by many Local Authorities that concentrated on providing practical advice about the riskiest

activities in catering businesses. The key flexibilities in the regulation considered by the Agency are as follows:

- Food business operators should put in place, implement and maintain procedures *based on* HACCP principles;
- Documentation and record keeping should be commensurate with the size and nature of the business;
- The HACCP requirements should take account of the principles contained in the Codex Alimentarius;
- Establishing critical limits does not imply that it is necessary to fix a numerical limit in every case.

In SFBB heavy emphasis is placed on corrective action, both daily and with a planned 4-weekly review. For small catering businesses, where the manager/chef is directly supervising the kitchen/food preparation area, the level of record keeping in SFBB is appropriate to comply with the new regulation and minimises the administrative burden on business.

Development, Testing and Further Work

SFBB was developed by the Agency with a team of experts, small businesses and local authority colleagues and tested with the support of sixteen local authorities. This provided feedback to refine the design and the approach and also established the most effective ways of engaging and coaching businesses in its use.

The trial demonstrated that SFBB could be effectively implemented through Local Authorities and improved food safety management in the small businesses it was used with. While the practical approach of SFBB was well received, suggestions for further refinement highlighted the need to simplify the approach further and to increase the number of pictures to reinforce key messages. This feedback has been incorporated into the final version of the pack so it is simpler, easier to use and contains more pictures. This will be rolled out across England from Autumn 2005.

The original trial version of SFBB was developed for a 30-seater restaurant producing European style cuisine. Given the enormous diversity of the catering industry it was clear that the Agency needed to adapt guidance for different sectors and cuisines. Working with a team involving businesses and experts, adaptations for ethnic cuisines e.g. Indian and different sectors e.g. function catering have been developed. Work is also in hand with the Association of Convenience Stores and British Retail Consortium to adapt SFBB for smaller retail outlets / convenience stores. This adapted material will be available on the Agency web site.

Conclusion

The new approach to HACCP that has been specifically developed for small businesses in the catering sector has many improvements over the 'classical' approach to HACCP methodology. Results from the largest and most stringent research project to have ever taken place in the field demonstrate that it has met with a positive reception in the industry and created notable food safety improvements at knowledge, attitude and behavioural levels.