



How safe is your food supplier?



Neil Rush strongly advises caterers to make sure their suppliers have satisfactory controls in place to keep raw and ready to eat foods apart - or face the consequences

The simple task of keeping raw and ready-to-eat foods apart during all stages of storage, preparation and handling would reduce the risk of an outbreak of food poisoning from your establishment. We will examine this in a subsequent item for our own operation. What, though, is happening at your suppliers? *Are you aware if they have the necessary controls in place, especially in respect of bought-in ready-to-eat food.*

Recently the butcher supplying cooked meats to schools in Wales, which resulted in an E. coli food poisoning outbreak, during which one child died and there were 156 cases, was jailed for 12 months. It was found that a vacuum packing machine was used for both raw and cooked food and that inadequate cleaning lead to cross contamination.

Every caterer, wherever catering for school children, the sick, the elderly or the general public, needs to have in place a sound system of confirming that their suppliers have satisfactory controls in place to ensure the safety of the food supplied. Poor quality and unsafe food from a supplier risks your reputation and brand.

My company has undertaken the food supplier assessment on behalf of the NHS for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland for over 12 years, which is probably the most at risk caterer in Europe. While most caterers do not need to have in place such extensive controls as the NHS, as part of your

HACCP assessment, you should consider the risk from each supplier and determine the necessary evidence to demonstrate that you have controlled this risk. This may simply be asking your suppliers to produce a certificate of external assessment, for example, audit to the British Retail Consortium Global Standard - Food. If not to this standard you need to ensure the auditing company has suitable credibility, e.g., UKAS accredited. It is important to ensure that the certificate produced is current and that when this expires a new certificate is obtained.

It is inappropriate to depend upon the EHO's report for the supplier. This does not provide you with the defence of due diligence, but more importantly such reports are an assessment at a point of time, may not cover the whole operation of the supplier and do not provide an approval for a period of time. It is also difficult to know if you have been sent the last EHO report and when the next one is due.

Failure to ensure the safety of food from your suppliers, especially high-risk foods, has the potential to ruin your business reputation, whether it be due to poor quality food or more significantly, contaminated food presenting a the risk of food poisoning. Simple controls can prevent this risk.

Neil Rush is a member of the Foodservice Consultants Society International and Managing Director of Support Training & Services PLC.