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Professional Resources for Care, Catering & Hospitality

FREE PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE

FOOD SAFETY RECORDS AND DUE DILIGENCE IN CARE CATERING

A Practical Guide for Care Staff

Knowledge Hub Resource 084

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INTRODUCTION

This free professional guide explains why accurate food-safety records are important in care catering and how they help demonstrate that food-safety procedures are being followed.

It covers completing records accurately, recording corrective action, maintaining documents securely and understanding how effective food-safety systems may support evidence of due diligence.

FREE PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE

Catering, Food Safety & Kitchen Compliance Resources

Suitable for care home cooks, chefs, kitchen assistants, catering managers and staff responsible for completing, checking or maintaining food-safety records.

IMPORTANT

This guide supports awareness and good practice. It does not provide legal advice.

Food businesses and catering staff must follow their organisation's food-safety management system, record-retention requirements and reporting procedures.

Records can provide important evidence of the precautions taken by a food business, but completing paperwork alone does not automatically establish a legal defence. Food-safety procedures must also be suitable, implemented, monitored and followed in practice.

WHY FOOD-SAFETY RECORDS MATTER

Food-safety records help demonstrate that important checks have been completed and that appropriate action has been taken when something goes wrong.

In care catering, reliable records are particularly important because residents and other people receiving care may be more vulnerable to serious illness from unsafe food.

Effective records can help an organisation:

• Monitor important food-safety controls.

• Identify recurring problems or equipment faults.

• Confirm that corrective action has been taken.

• Support communication between catering staff, managers and different shifts.

• Provide evidence during inspections, audits or investigations.

• Review whether the food-safety management system is working effectively.

• Demonstrate that staff have followed agreed procedures.

Records should reflect what actually happened. They must never be completed simply to make a file appear complete.

UNDERSTANDING DUE DILIGENCE

Under Section 21 of the Food Safety Act 1990, a person or business may seek to rely on a defence of due diligence in certain legal proceedings by demonstrating that all reasonable precautions were taken and all due diligence was exercised to avoid committing the offence.

What is considered reasonable will depend on the circumstances, including the nature and size of the food operation and the risks involved.

Evidence may include:

• A suitable food-safety management system.

• Clear policies, procedures and work instructions.

• Staff training, instruction and supervision.

• Monitoring records and completed checks.

• Maintenance, cleaning and pest-control records.

• Supplier information and delivery records.

• Evidence that problems were reported and corrected promptly.

• Regular reviews and updates to food-safety procedures.

Records may help demonstrate what precautions were taken, but records alone are not enough.

The organisation must be able to show that its food-safety controls were suitable, properly implemented and followed consistently.

COMMON FOOD-SAFETY RECORDS IN CARE CATERING

The exact records required will depend on the organisation’s activities, food-safety management system and local procedures.

Common examples include:

FOOD DELIVERY RECORDS

These may record chilled and frozen food temperatures, packaging condition, date codes, signs of contamination and rejected deliveries.

FOOD STORAGE TEMPERATURE RECORDS

These may include refrigerator, freezer and cold-room checks, together with any action taken when temperatures fall outside agreed limits.

COOKING AND REHEATING RECORDS

These may record the food, date, time, temperature reading and confirmation that the organisation's required cooking or reheating standard was achieved.

COOLING RECORDS

These may show when cooling began, when food entered chilled storage and whether the required cooling procedure was followed.

HOT-HOLDING AND MEAL-SERVICE RECORDS

These may document temperatures during hot holding, meal service and transportation from the kitchen to the resident.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTION RECORDS

These may confirm that scheduled cleaning tasks were completed and record any missed tasks, contamination concerns or corrective action.

FOOD-PROBE ACCURACY RECORDS

These may show when a probe thermometer was checked, the result obtained and any calibration, repair or replacement action required.

ALLERGEN INFORMATION AND CHECKS

These may include approved recipes, ingredient information, supplier updates, allergen matrices, meal-identification checks and records of allergen-related incidents or concerns.

PEST-CONTROL RECORDS

These may include contractor reports, internal checks, evidence of pest activity and action taken.

STAFF TRAINING RECORDS

These may confirm induction, food-hygiene instruction, refresher training, competency checks and additional training following a problem.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD RECORD KEEPING

Food-safety records should be:

ACCURATE

Record the actual observation, measurement or action. Never guess, estimate or enter a preferred result.

CONTEMPORANEOUS

Complete the record at the time the check or activity takes place, or as soon as reasonably possible afterwards.

CLEAR

Write legibly and use the correct form, date, time and units of measurement.

COMPLETE

Fill in every required section. Do not leave unexplained blank spaces.

TRACEABLE

The record should identify who completed the check. Use the required name, initials, signature or secure electronic identification.

FACTUAL

Record what was seen, measured or done. Avoid personal opinions or unclear language.

HONEST

Never falsify, backdate, pre-complete or alter a record to hide a missed check or an unsafe result.

SECURE

Protect records from loss, damage, unauthorised alteration or inappropriate access.

AVAILABLE

Records should be stored so authorised staff can locate them when needed for management checks, inspections or investigations.

COMPLETING RECORDS CORRECTLY

Before completing a food-safety record:

- Use the current approved version of the form or electronic system.
- Confirm that you understand the required check.
- Use suitable, clean and working equipment.
- Carry out the check at the required time.
- Enter the actual result immediately.
- Compare the result with the organisation's agreed limit or procedure.
- Take and record corrective action when required.
- Sign, initial or identify the entry as instructed.

Never enter a tick, acceptable temperature or completed action unless the check has genuinely taken place.

CORRECTING A PAPER RECORD

If an error is made on a paper record:

- Do not erase the original entry.
- Do not use correction fluid.
- Draw a single line through the incorrect information so it remains readable.
- Enter the correct information clearly.
- Add your initials and the date if required by organisational procedure.

Follow the organisation's approved process when correcting electronic records. Electronic systems should maintain an appropriate record of changes where required.

RECORDING CORRECTIVE ACTION

Recording a failed check without recording what happened next leaves the record incomplete.

Corrective-action entries should explain:

• What problem was identified.

• What immediate action was taken.

• What happened to any affected food.

• Whether equipment was adjusted, repaired or removed from use.

• Who was informed.

• Whether further monitoring was required.

• Whether the problem was resolved.

Examples of corrective action may include:

• Rejecting a food delivery.

• Moving food to safe alternative storage.

• Continuing cooking or reheating until the required standard is achieved.

• Discarding food that cannot be made safe.

• Removing faulty equipment from use.

• Arranging repair, maintenance or replacement.

• Cleaning and disinfecting an affected area.

• Reporting the incident to a manager.

• Providing additional staff instruction or supervision.

Corrective action must follow the organisation's food-safety procedure. Staff should not invent an unapproved solution.

MISSED CHECKS AND INCOMPLETE RECORDS

A missed check must never be disguised by entering a result later without evidence.

If a check has been missed:

• Inform the responsible person promptly.

• Complete the required check immediately where this remains meaningful and safe.

• Clearly record that the scheduled check was missed.

• Record any assessment or corrective action taken.

• Follow the organisation's reporting procedure.

• Consider whether any food may have been affected.

Repeated missed checks may indicate a problem with staffing, training, supervision, equipment or the suitability of the recording system. These concerns should be reviewed by management.

REVIEWING AND MANAGING RECORDS

Managers or authorised staff should review food-safety records regularly.

A review should consider:

• Whether required checks are being completed.

• Whether entries are accurate, clear and complete.

• Whether results remain within agreed limits.

• Whether corrective actions are suitable and fully recorded.

• Whether the same problems are happening repeatedly.

• Whether equipment maintenance or staff training is required.

• Whether forms and procedures remain current.

• Whether records are stored securely and can be retrieved.

• Whether changes to the menu, equipment, suppliers or working methods require the food-safety system to be reviewed.

Records should be retained for the period specified by the organisation's food-safety management system and any applicable legal, contractual or local-authority requirements.

There is no single retention period suitable for every type of food-safety record. The appropriate period may depend on factors such as the type of food, product shelf life, organisational policy and the purpose of the record.

PAPER AND ELECTRONIC RECORDS

Food-safety records may be kept on paper or through an approved electronic system.

PAPER RECORDS

Paper forms should be:

• Kept clean, legible and protected from damage.

• Stored in the correct file or designated location.

• Protected from unauthorised changes.

• Retained for the required period.

ELECTRONIC RECORDS

Electronic systems should:

• Be accessible only to authorised users.

• Use individual identification or secure login details where required.

• Protect information from unauthorised alteration or deletion.

• Maintain appropriate backups.

• Record changes or corrections where required.

• Allow information to be retrieved for inspection, audit or investigation.

Staff must never share passwords or use another person's identity to complete a food-safety record.

FOOD-SAFETY RECORDS CHECKLIST

☐ I used the current approved form or electronic system.

☐ I completed the check at the required time.

☐ I entered the actual result rather than guessing.

☐ I used the correct date, time and measurement units.

☐ I clearly identified who completed the check.

☐ I compared the result with the organisation's agreed limit.

☐ I recorded any problem or failed check honestly.

☐ I took and recorded the required corrective action.

☐ I reported serious or repeated concerns promptly.

☐ I corrected errors without hiding the original entry.

☐ I stored the completed record in the correct location.

☐ I protected passwords and confidential information.

KEY MESSAGE

Food-safety records should provide an honest and reliable account of the checks completed, the results obtained and the actions taken.

Good records help organisations monitor food safety, identify problems and demonstrate that agreed procedures are being followed.

Records support due diligence only when they reflect effective food-safety controls that are properly implemented and followed in practice.

OFFICIAL FURTHER INFORMATION

Food Standards Agency – MyHACCP: Documentation and Record Keeping

https://myhaccp.food.gov.uk/help/guidance/principle-7-establish-documentation-and-record-keeping

Food Standards Agency – Safer Food Better Business

https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/safer-food-better-business-sfbb

Food Standards Agency – Managing Food Safety

https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/managing-food-safety

Food Safety Act 1990 – Section 21: Defence of Due Diligence

https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/16/section/21

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