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Professional Resources for Care, Catering & Hospitality

FREE PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE

GLASS AND BRITTLE PLASTIC CONTROL IN CARE CATERING

A Practical Guide for Care Staff

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INTRODUCTION

This free professional guide explains how catering staff can help prevent food contamination caused by broken glass, brittle plastic and other breakable materials.

It covers identifying potential hazards, reducing unnecessary glass, completing routine checks, responding safely to breakages, protecting food and equipment, cleaning affected areas and recording incidents.

FREE PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE

Catering, Food Safety & Kitchen Compliance Resources

Suitable for care home cooks, chefs, kitchen assistants, catering managers and staff responsible for receiving, storing, preparing or serving food.

IMPORTANT

This guide supports awareness and good practice.

Staff must follow their organisation's food-safety management system, glass and brittle-plastic procedure, risk assessments, incident-reporting arrangements and waste-disposal rules.

Never serve food that may contain glass, brittle plastic or another sharp foreign object.

WHY GLASS AND BRITTLE PLASTIC ARE SERIOUS HAZARDS

Broken glass and brittle plastic can create sharp fragments that are difficult to see and may spread beyond the immediate breakage area.

If swallowed, fragments could cause:

- Cuts to the mouth or throat.
- Choking.
- Damage to teeth.
- Internal injury or bleeding.
- Serious distress and medical harm.

Residents in care settings may be unable to recognise or communicate that food contains a foreign object.

Some residents may also have swallowing difficulties or require texture-modified food, making strong preventive controls especially important.

WHAT IS BRITTLE PLASTIC?

Brittle plastic is a rigid material that may crack, splinter or shatter when damaged.

Examples may include:

- Hard plastic containers.
- Measuring jugs.
- Refrigerator or freezer components.
- Transparent equipment guards.
- Light covers.
- Display covers.
- Hard plastic utensils.
- Storage-box lids.
- Appliance panels.
- Control knobs.
- Food-processor components.
- Cracked reusable tableware.

Not all plastic presents the same risk. The organisation should identify items that could produce sharp or difficult-to-detect fragments if broken.

COMMON SOURCES OF GLASS

Glass may be present in:

- Jars and bottles.
- Drinking glasses.
- Serving dishes.
- Glass bowls.
- Measuring containers.
- Refrigerator shelves.
- Oven doors.
- Display cabinets.
- Light fittings.
- Windows and doors.
- Mirrors.
- Clocks and wall displays.
- Thermometer casings.
- Equipment inspection panels.
- Personal belongings brought into food areas.

Glass should be removed from food-preparation and storage areas wherever a safer suitable alternative can be used.

REDUCING THE RISK

A low-glass or no-glass approach can reduce the likelihood of breakages.

Controls may include:

• Purchasing products in non-glass packaging where practical.

• Decanting ingredients safely under an approved procedure.

• Using suitable stainless-steel or food-safe plastic equipment.

• Keeping drinking glasses away from food-preparation areas.

• Prohibiting glass personal items in production areas.

• Protecting light fittings.

• Replacing cracked or damaged equipment promptly.

• Keeping glass containers away from exposed food.

• Storing necessary glass items securely.

• Training staff in the breakage procedure.

Replacing glass must not introduce another hazard. Alternative equipment must remain suitable for food use, cleaning, temperature and its intended purpose.

RECEIVING GLASS CONTAINERS

When receiving products in glass containers:

• Check the outer packaging for damage.

• Inspect bottles and jars for cracks or chips.

• Check that lids and seals are secure.

• Look for moisture, leakage or loose fragments.

• Handle containers carefully.

• Do not accept visibly damaged products.

• Record and report rejected deliveries.

• Follow the organisation's procedure for safe storage.

A damaged delivery should not be taken through food-preparation areas unnecessarily.

SAFE STORAGE OF GLASS ITEMS

Where glass containers are necessary:

• Store them in a stable location.

• Keep them away from shelf edges.

• Avoid over-stacking.

• Use suitable trays or containers where required.

• Keep them away from exposed food.

• Store heavy glass items at a safe height.

• Avoid placing glass above open ingredients.

• Maintain enough space for safe handling.

• Check storage areas regularly for damage.

• Keep shelves secure and in good condition.

Glass items should not be stored where a breakage could contaminate a wide area or fall into food stored below.

ROUTINE GLASS AND BRITTLE-PLASTIC CHECKS

The organisation may maintain a register of glass and brittle-plastic items.

Routine checks may include:

• Windows and doors.

• Light fittings and covers.

• Refrigerator and freezer components.

• Oven and equipment doors.

• Display cabinets.

• Equipment guards.

• Storage containers and lids.

• Measuring equipment.

• Hard plastic utensils.

• Crockery and serving equipment.

• Clocks, mirrors and wall-mounted items.

• Food-processor and mixer components.

Staff should look for:

• Cracks.

• Chips.

• Missing pieces.

• Loose fittings.

• Scratches that may weaken the item.

• Clouding or stress marks in plastic.

• Damaged edges.

• Previous temporary repairs.

• Signs that an item has been dropped or struck.

Any damaged item should be removed from use and reported promptly.

WHAT TO DO WHEN A BREAKAGE OCCURS

If glass or brittle plastic breaks:

• Stop food preparation immediately in the affected area.

• Tell everyone nearby to stop moving.

• Inform the catering manager or responsible person.

• Prevent access to the area.

• Identify the point where the breakage occurred.

• Consider how far fragments may have travelled.

• Protect unaffected food and equipment.

• Isolate all potentially contaminated food.

• Follow the organisation's breakage procedure.

• Arrange safe clean-up using designated equipment.

• Record the incident and all action taken.

Work must not restart until the responsible person confirms that the area is safe.

ESTABLISHING THE AFFECTED AREA

Fragments can travel further than expected.

The responsible person should consider:

• The height from which the item fell.

• The force of the breakage.

• The type of material.

• Whether the item shattered or broke into large pieces.

• Nearby open food.

• Food-contact surfaces.

• Equipment openings.

• Shelving and storage containers.

• Floor drains and difficult-to-reach areas.

• Staff footwear or trolley wheels.

• Air movement.

• Whether fragments could have entered another room or service area.

When there is uncertainty, the affected area should be made larger rather than risking contaminated food being used.

DEALING WITH EXPOSED FOOD

Food must be discarded if fragments may have entered it.

This may include:

• Uncovered food.

• Food in open containers.

• Food being prepared.

• Ingredients stored below the breakage.

• Food on nearby shelves.

• Meals awaiting service.

• Food inside equipment that was open.

• Ice held near broken glass.

• Garnishes, condiments or drinks within the affected area.

Do not try to save potentially contaminated food by:

• Removing visible fragments.

• Sieving the food.

• Washing the food.

• Picking around the affected area.

• Transferring the food into another container.

Tiny fragments may remain even when food appears safe.

CHECKING PACKAGED FOOD

Sealed food may sometimes remain protected, but it must be assessed carefully by the responsible person.

Checks may include:

• Whether the packaging is fully sealed.

• Whether the packaging has been punctured or damaged.

• Whether fragments are trapped around seals or openings.

• Whether the outer surface can be cleaned safely.

• Whether opening the package could introduce fragments.

• Whether the product can be identified and isolated.

If safety cannot be confirmed, the food must not be used.

CLEANING UP A BREAKAGE

Only trained or authorised staff should clean the affected area.

The breakage procedure may require staff to:

• Wear appropriate protective equipment.

• Use a designated dustpan and brush.

• Collect large pieces carefully.

• Work from the outside of the affected area towards the centre.

• Check beneath and behind equipment.

• Inspect shelves, ledges and equipment openings.

• Clean and disinfect affected food-contact surfaces.

• Dispose of cleaning materials where required.

• Check footwear and trolley wheels.

• Place fragments in an approved rigid container.

• Reinspect the area under good lighting.

Do not use bare hands to collect fragments.

Do not place sharp glass directly into an ordinary plastic waste bag.

CLEANING EQUIPMENT USED AFTER A BREAKAGE

Cleaning tools used for broken glass or brittle plastic should be controlled carefully.

The organisation may provide:

• A dedicated dustpan and brush.

• A rigid, puncture-resistant waste container.

• Protective gloves.

• Disposable cloths.

• Approved cleaning and disinfection products.

• A torch for inspection.

• Suitable signs or barriers.

Equipment used for a breakage should be cleaned, checked, stored and replaced in accordance with organisational procedure.

Do not return contaminated cleaning tools to routine kitchen use.

CHECKING CATERING EQUIPMENT

Where fragments may have reached equipment:

• Stop using the equipment.

• Disconnect it safely where authorised.

• Do not dismantle machinery unless trained to do so.

• Inspect accessible surfaces and openings.

• Inform the responsible manager.

• Arrange specialist inspection where required.

• Clean and disinfect the equipment before reuse.

• Record the inspection and decision.

Equipment must not return to service until it has been confirmed safe.

REPLACING BROKEN OR DAMAGED ITEMS

After an incident:

• Account for the broken item where possible.

• Check whether any pieces appear to be missing.

• Remove similar damaged items from use.

• Review why the breakage occurred.

• Consider whether the item should be replaced with a safer alternative.

• Arrange necessary repairs.

• Update the glass and brittle-plastic register where used.

• Review storage or handling arrangements.

• Provide further staff instruction where necessary.

An incident review should focus on preventing recurrence, not simply cleaning the immediate area.

MAINTENANCE AND CONTRACTOR WORK

Maintenance can introduce glass, screws, plastic fragments and other foreign objects.

Before maintenance begins:

• Remove or protect exposed food.

• Clear nearby work surfaces.

• Close food-storage containers.

• Restrict access to the area.

• Inform contractors of food-hygiene requirements.

• Account for tools and materials.

• Inspect and clean the area after the work.

• Check protective light covers and equipment panels.

• Obtain approval before food preparation restarts.

Planned work involving glass or brittle materials should take place outside food-production periods where possible.

REPORTING AND RECORD KEEPING

Records may include:

• Date and time of the incident.

• Exact location.

• Item that broke.

• Material involved.

• Food, packaging and equipment affected.

• Quantity of food discarded.

• Area isolated.

• Cleaning and inspection completed.

• Staff involved.

• Injuries or near misses.

• Maintenance or replacement required.

• Corrective action taken.

• Authorisation to restart work.

• Review findings and preventive action.

Routine glass and brittle-plastic inspection records should also be retained where required by the organisation’s food-safety system.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

Do not:

• Continue preparing food after a breakage.

• Walk through the affected area unnecessarily.

• Pick up fragments with bare hands.

• Save exposed food by removing visible pieces.

• Use ordinary plastic bags for sharp fragments.

• Sweep fragments towards food or clean areas.

• Use contaminated cleaning equipment elsewhere.

• Forget to inspect footwear and trolley wheels.

• Restart work before authorisation.

• Hide or fail to report a breakage.

• Leave cracked equipment in use.

• Assume brittle plastic is harmless because it is not glass.

GLASS AND BRITTLE-PLASTIC CHECKLIST

☐ Unnecessary glass is excluded from food areas.

☐ Necessary glass items are stored securely.

☐ Glass and brittle-plastic items are inspected regularly.

☐ Cracked, chipped or damaged items are removed promptly.

☐ Staff understand the breakage procedure.

☐ Food preparation stops immediately after a breakage.

☐ The affected area is isolated.

☐ Potentially contaminated food is discarded.

☐ Designated clean-up equipment is used.

☐ Equipment, surfaces and difficult-to-reach areas are inspected.

☐ Fragments are placed in an approved rigid container.

☐ The incident and corrective actions are recorded.

☐ Work restarts only after the area is confirmed safe.

KEY MESSAGE

Glass and brittle plastic can produce sharp fragments that are difficult to see and may cause serious harm.

Reduce unnecessary breakable materials, inspect necessary items regularly and act immediately when a breakage occurs.

Stop work, isolate the area, discard potentially contaminated food, complete a thorough clean and inspection, and do not restart until authorised.

OFFICIAL FURTHER INFORMATION

Food Standards Agency – MyHACCP General Prerequisite Requirements

https://myhaccp.food.gov.uk/help/guidance/general-requirements-be-considered-each-prerequisite

Food Standards Agency – MyHACCP Documentation and Record Keeping

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

GOV.UK – Safer Food Better Business for Caterers

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safer-food-better-business-for-caterers

GOV.UK – Managing Food Safety

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-food-safety/managing-food-safety

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