



September 2015 - Volume 1,
Issue 5

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Food Poisoning Complaints

In any instance prevention is better than cure, which is why FCS offers the Hygiene Survey (audit) as a pro-active measure to prevent such complaints from occurring.

The complainant is likely to lodge a complaint with the Consumer Goods and Services Ombud, which also involves the process of reporting the complaint to the local Environmental Health Officer, who may launch an investigation.

Since food poisoning complaints are a reality, there are thus a few procedures that need to be followed in order to ensure that you are able to prove due diligence, over and above the hygiene audit.

1. Food samples of any mass-produced foods must be kept from each serving for at least 72 hours. This means that any banqueting function or buffet must be sampled and these foods kept in the fridge for the required period.
2. Contact one of our Hygiene Consultants as soon as you are made aware of the complaint, so that we may make arrangements to collect the samples in question.
3. Our laboratory will test these foods for all the common food pathogens that are most likely to have caused the complaint. These results will serve as evidence either supporting (or much more often) refuting the complaint.
4. It is best to make these results available to the client; this often resolves the dispute. These results, in conjunction with your daily, weekly and monthly records-keeping, and well as the hygiene audit results, are excellent tools for proving due diligence in such cases.
5. You should politely insist that the complainant see a medical doctor to obtain a faeces or vomitus sample that will need to be tested for the presence of microbes that are the same as those we found in the food sample we tested. Only this is definitive proof of food-poisoning.



These procedures do of course assume that there is a good food safety management system in place. Even if the food samples are found to have been contaminated and have caused the food poisoning, the above is sufficient to prove a lack of negligence (that is the food poisoning was a true freak event that could not have been predicted or prevented).

However, should the case be that there is no active management system in place (usually gauged as a minimum 75% Composite Walkthrough visual score) and the samples tested produce a concerning result, you may be liable for damages and could face litigation.



Manual Scullery

Manual sculleries are almost universally used for cleaning large kitchen wares such as pots and pans, as well as cutting boards and the like. Unfortunately, they often prove to be one of the riskiest departments too.

We have already discussed the correct way to clean and sanitise a nylon cutting board—arguably the most high-risk single type of item at the potwash—in a previous newsletter (June 2015). This article will cover the general practices for other items.

Ideally a three-sink system should be used; however, most premises can only muster two sinks. In this case, the following applies:

Washing	Rinsing
45°C minimum	45°C minimum; 2 minute soak
Neutral Manual Detergent	Heat-stable (QAC) sanitiser

The washing sink should be dosed with a suitable neutral manual detergent. Never mix any chemicals! This can result in reduced activity or even dangerous by-products.

The rinsing sink should be dosed with a heat-stable sanitiser, most typically a quaternary ammonium compound. Such a "QAC" is a type of detergent with anti-bacterial properties that also is not so easily inactivated by food residue and dirt (although items should be spotlessly clean before sanitising). It also has a (weak) cleaning action.

The high temperature and time are necessary to ensure that items emerging from the final rinsing sink air-dry rapidly, because residual moisture is one of the leading causes of bacterial growth.

We do not recommend the use of sanitising protocols that avoid heat. Simply because it hinders drying at the end. In fact chlorine cannot be used because it is dangerous at high temperatures.

All items should be stored in such a way as to ensure that they air-dry and remain dry. Thus all hollow items should be inverted and small utensils should be hung up or kept in (clean) perforated containers. Flat items can be stored in a vertical rack.

PROCEDURES

1. Pre-scrape as much excess dirt and food residue as possible from the equipment **before** placing it in the detergent sink.
2. Wash using a suitable scouring sponge, pad or brush. Cloths and (especially) old string bags are not recommended. "Steel wool" is not ideal because it can leave fine steel strands on the items afterwards. Thick-strand steel scourers are more acceptable.
3. When items are **spotlessly** clean to the naked eye (and not greasy to the touch), dip them in the middle of the three sinks (assuming you have one) to remove excess detergent. Finally, in all cases, soak for at least 2 minutes in the last, hot sanitising sink.
4. Never use running water to rinse. It has no sanitising or heat-absorption effect (even if using hot water, which is a waste too).
5. In fact, if one is available, an automatic warewashing machine can be used as the final sanitising step. Run the items through the machine but please note that they must be scrubbed as normal in the washing sink beforehand. The machine replaces only the rinsing step.
6. If only a single sink is available, or there is no reliable hot water supply, the machine washer is the best option. Otherwise a portable basin or lug must be obtained to use as the second sink and a way found to top-up the hot water (with a "Hydroboil" or by heating water on the stove).
7. Critically, all items should be stored in such a way as to ensure that they air-dry and remain dry. Thus all hollow items should be inverted and small utensils should be hung up or kept in (clean) perforated containers. Flat items can be stored in a vertical rack.
8. Always drain and rinse the sinks after use. If necessary, they too should be washed.

Calibration Audits

Upholding and improving quality standards in our Hygiene (risk assessment) Surveys is an absolutely key principle at FCS. Thus, in order to keep the standards of the entire auditing team high, FCS has for a long time implemented a unique quality assurance programme we call the “calibration audit”.

This is essentially an audit that is performed by all our auditors, in the same kitchen at the same time. This provides us with usable data that helps us align our observations and ensure that we minimise discrepancies between our staff.

The Calibration takes place at a selected kitchen and all auditors complete the standard visual score-sheet on our tablets in the kitchen simultaneously.

During this audit we compare scores and discuss each checkpoint of the audit, which can sometimes be contentious, to ensure we all agree on how to score the checkpoints. This is critical in finding a consensus.

We also discuss industry standards and changes that have occurred between the calibration audits.

FCS implemented these calibration audits over 9 years ago and has been running them at least quarterly since 2006.

Further to this, all auditors undergo individual assessments throughout the year, as part of our ongoing training.

It is due to both our calibration and assessment audits, which form a continuous improvement programme, that we are able to guarantee consistency between our auditors.

We would like to thank our clients: **Sun International (Sun City Cabanas Hotel)**



Peermont (Emperor's Palace Fortuna Kitchen)



and **Capital Hotels (Moloko Hotel)**



for allowing us to use their facilities this year for our calibration audits. You can be assured that you have contributed to our improvement on standards.

Get to Know FCS



Back (left to right): Naideen Cassim, Sello Mokobe, Florence Maeko

Front (left to right): Maureen Mampeule, Elizabeth Maake, Daphne Mokhubedu

Our Laboratory Technicians are also all highly qualified with appropriate tertiary qualifications in the biological sciences to enable them to perform the various testing methods and result interpretations with the best possible accuracy.

The diverse operations of FCS would not be at all possible, and especially at our high standard, if we did not have the services of our excellent Laboratory Department.

Pictured above are some of the members of our Chemistry Laboratory Technicians & Laboratory Assistants who are instrumental in testing of the samples from our FMCG retailer clients. Our Laboratory Assistants are also involved in the preparation of the media used for the various tests, as well as for the swabs that are used for most of the Hygiene Audits.

The Laboratory Technicians & Assistants are not only tasked with testing the samples for the various chemical assays but they must also adhere to a very strictly monitored quality control system to ensure the relevant tests are performed, and results are interpreted, according to our strict standards.