



Scores on Doors Challenges for councils

Councils often have similar questions and concerns when considering participation in the Scores on Doors program.

Resources?

The Scores on Doors program is designed to minimise any impact on resources. Council Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) already undertake the inspections on which the rating is based, and most already use the standard inspection checklist (Food Premises Assessment Report or FPAR). The NSW Food Authority provides the display certificates and stickers, and EHOs can issue the appropriate certificate and sticker on the spot at the end of the inspection (if it prefers, council can opt to print co-branded certificates onto design artwork the NSW Food Authority can supply, or overprint the premises details onto certificates and dispatch from the office).

Having more businesses participate in Scores on Doors can actually save work for EHOs by increasing

the number of high performing businesses in the area and thereby reducing the need for follow-up inspections. Councils can also opt for a lower inspection frequency for well performing businesses, creating a further saving as the awareness of food safety culture and compliance within premises increases.

Food business opposition?

Scores on Doors is designed to be a positive program that provides premises with incentives to display the certificate and sticker and, potentially, to take steps to raise their score. Refinements to the program design and operation in 2013 strengthened this approach by removing perceived obstacles to participation:

- businesses no longer required to sign a participation agreement
- the design of the certificates no longer includes the full set of possible ratings, and

- certificates more self-explanatory so customers understand and value what they represent.

Participation in Scores on Doors does not require food premises to do anything extra, other than display its certificate and sticker near its entrance. Certificates and stickers can be issued routinely after existing food safety inspections. Unless premises are receiving critical breaches, they already invest in food safety compliance and the certificates help each business to demonstrate this to customers.

Public display of certificates and stickers is designed to build consumer trust, which can attract more custom. Indeed, when councils participate in the Scores on Doors program and premises are displaying certificates and stickers, the lack of these at a food business may raise doubts about the premises for its customers. Businesses assessed to have critical food safety breaches are not entitled to a Scores on Doors certificate and sticker.

Rating reliability?

Ratings must be based on scores achieved during unannounced food safety inspections by authorised officers. Use of the FPAR checklist with in-built scores helps to standardise ratings and maximise reliability. The checklist is a reliable tool because it has been developed in consultation with councils and is based on legislative requirements of the Food Standards Code.

If critical breaches are identified according to the FPAR during inspection, a food premises becomes ineligible to receive a certificate and sticker and is assigned a 'no grade'. Critical issues can be dealt with according to council's enforcement guidelines where officers use a range of enforcement tools depending on severity of the issue. At the more serious end of the spectrum these may include penalty notices, prohibition or seizure orders, and prosecutions.

If a business which does not qualify for a star rating wishes to receive a new rating after rectifying the issues, it may request a reinspection (if council opts to make reinspections available) or wait until its next routine inspection.

Liability?

By issuing inspection result certificates and stickers, councils and inspection staff are merely promoting public visibility of the compliance monitoring activity they already

undertake. Council is not liable for compliance failures or issues with premises conditions because every certificate includes a legal disclaimer. Among other things, the disclaimer states that certificates are issued in good faith but intended as a general guide only and are not to be relied upon.

Certificates have an expiry date, determined by the inspecting officer in accordance with council policy. Display of out-of-date or misleading certificates by a food premises is considered misleading conduct and may be dealt with as appropriate. Certificates remain the property of the council and the NSW Food Authority. If needed, it could be reclaimed if it becomes inappropriate for a premises to display it, for example if critical breaches are found during investigation of a complaint.

Disinterest?

There are clear benefits to participating in the Scores on Doors program. A visible Scores on Doors program with participating food premises can be a source of civic pride and economic strength. Each certificate and sticker displayed is a visible, street-level demonstration of council working to inspect premises and protect customers. The program supports food businesses and gives EHOs some good news when inspecting food premises. Scores on Doors offers an easy council win.

Other priorities?

The Food Regulation Partnership has been in place since 2008 and, with councils help and regular engagement, has produced significant advances in consistency of food safety compliance activities. Implementation of Food Safety Supervisors has been a significant undertaking since 2010. The expansion of the enhanced Scores on Doors program is also timely because many councils have also already adopted a foundation piece for the program, namely the FPAR inspection checklist.

Furthermore, Scores on Doors complements any food safety education activities that councils run for food premises and food handlers because it reinforces how food safety compliance and culture can protect the public and be rewarded with public recognition.

Public support?

Consumer expectations for access to official information on premises' food safety performance is strong and rising. The enormous public demand for, and interest in, the NSW Food Authority's Name & Shame register demonstrates consumers preference for transparent information so they can make their own choices about where to eat. Scores on Doors provides food safety compliance information routinely, not just when food safety breaches happen, and is therefore a positive parallel program to the Name & Shame register.

For more information about Scores on Doors

Contact the NSW Food Authority on: 1300 552 406 or contact@foodauthority.nsw.gov.au

www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/scoresondoors