

NSW Vulnerable Persons Food Safety Scheme Consultative Committee

Wednesday 5 November 2014

Summary of meeting outcomes

The NSW Vulnerable Persons Food Safety Scheme Consultative Committee held a meeting in Sydney on Wednesday, 5 November 2014. Specific issues considered by the Committee at its meeting are detailed below.

NSW Food Authority food safety program compliance report

The vulnerable persons (VP) sector industry compliance report for the period 1 July 2013 to 30 June 2014 was presented for members' information. It was noted that during the period there had been 1,487 acceptable rated audits with the failure rate down to 1.85%. There were no consecutive failed audits during this time.

Graphs showing trends in the audit program and data analysis over a longer time frame of two years were presented to give a better overview of the industry. The majority of failed audits during the period were attributed to facility operator processes and/or serves. While the failure rate is very low, issues relating to process control and the food safety program monitoring of records were still being identified at audits. Comparative trend analysis of critical Corrective Action Requests (CARs) issued during the period showed there had been a 13% increase in CARs issued for hygiene and sanitation.

It was also noted that enforcement activities during the period were down, with no prosecutions, penalties or food-borne illness outbreaks being recorded. This reflected the impact of the high compliance rate and was a great result for the VP sector.

However the Committee was advised that the Authority's verification (unannounced) inspection program had failed several premises because of issues with recording cooking and cooling temperatures and with dirty, unhygienic blenders. The Authority will monitor this and write to the industry on this issue before the end of the year. Trend data on the unannounced program will be provided to the next meeting. Members were asked to provide feedback to their sectors on the importance of focussing on these particular areas and the Authority will communicate this advice to its third party auditors as well.

24-hour and 48-hour storage limitations

Following a query at the previous committee meeting regarding holding times for foods and ingredients, the Committee was provided with an update on the Authority's time limitation recommendations for use in the VP sector as set out in their *Guidelines for food service to vulnerable persons*. It was noted that whilst these are guidelines only, it is generally expected that if food service staff adopt these guidelines for storage of their food they will be accepted by auditors. If operators wish to move outside these guidelines by using alternative compliance methods, they will need to be able to demonstrate how their processes can be acceptable for audit purposes and have them written into their food safety programs. Operators were encouraged to contact the Authority should they have any questions and the Authority will look at their processes on a case by case basis.

Foodborne illness report analysis

The Committee received a presentation outlining the causes of foodborne illness and information the Authority looks at when dealing with this issue. Members were alerted to those pathogens which are more prevalent in aged care facilities and hospitals and it was noted that the food service area is accountable for 90% of the outbreaks that are seen in NSW. The information presented did not include foodborne illness related to allergens and it was advised that at this stage there is no national data base for people presenting with anaphylaxis and allergen issues.

FSANZ microbiological guidelines to Listeria

A report was presented which outlined changes to the FSANZ Microbiological Guidelines for *Listeria monocytogenes* (*L. Monocytogenes*) under Standard 1.6.1 of the Food Standards Code. This was brought to members' attention as *Listeria* is the main pathogen that is of concern in VP facilities. The amended standard includes criteria for *L. monocytogenes* on the basis of whether the food is ready-to-eat and can or cannot support growth of *L. monocytogenes*. It was noted that the amended guidelines will enable the Authority to have more flexibility in terms of how it deals with micro results. Members were advised that facilities can request copies of certificates of analysis from their suppliers on micro levels if a supplier is making a claim that a particular food won't support *Listeria* growth.

Importance of food recall process

A report was tabled on the importance of the Authority's food recall process. The report outlined action to be followed in the event of a food recall and explained the difference between consumer and trade level recalls. Members noted the information and recognised that whilst this is an issue which is more likely to affect suppliers, it is important for facilities to be aware of what to do if there is a food recall and to be precise in maintaining product records for trace-back purposes.

Concerns were raised on the difficulties in dealing with manufacturers and distributors of other products for companies and members were informed that the Authority will be working with manufacturers during the next year to put some general basic recall programs in place.

Communications strategy for vulnerable persons sector

The Committee received an update on work the Authority's communications branch has been doing to support the vulnerable persons sector. A range of fact sheets had been issued on preparation of texture modified foods; children's services – cooking with kids and hand washing for businesses; declaring allergens; and food safety requirements for charities and not-for-profit organisations. A number of these had also been translated into other languages. It was advised that the most traction and hits on the Authority's web-site were for the pregnancy-related issues.

Regulatory food safety auditor identity checks

Members noted a report on procedures the Authority has in place to ensure that all Regulatory Food Safety Auditors (third party auditors) who conduct audits of licensed aged care facilities are approved by the Authority. The report also served as a reminder to facility operators to ensure that they check for approvals of auditors by asking to see their Food Authority identification card on arrival. It was advised that a list of approved auditors is published on the Authority's website, and facilities should contact the Authority if they have any concerns.

The tentative date for the next meeting of the NSW Vulnerable Persons Food Safety Scheme Consultative Committee is 24 June 2015.

