

NSW Vulnerable Persons Food Safety Scheme Consultative Committee

Wednesday 26 June 2013

Summary of Outcomes

The NSW Vulnerable Persons Food Safety Scheme Consultative Committee held its sixth meeting in Sydney on Wednesday 26 June 2013. Specific issues considered by the Committee at its meeting are detailed below.

Food safety program compliance report

The Authority provided an update on the compliance, enforcement and inspection activities during the period 1 July 2012 to 31 December 2012. This included a breakdown on total audits and inspections conducted and percentage of corrective action requests (CARS) issued. During the reporting period there were 820 acceptable rated audits, with the level of unacceptable audits remaining low across the vulnerable persons (VP) sector with only a 3.0% failure rate. Where failed audits had occurred, all issues had been rectified in follow-up audits. In most facilities process control continues to be the main area where there are issues with audits. The Committee noted that the Authority is pleased with the excellent results for the sector which indicate there is a good regulatory process in place where areas of non-compliance are being rectified and addressed.

Scheduling of NSW Food Authority audits

A paper was tabled in relation to the scheduling of Authority audits at businesses in the VP sector. This issue was raised following a small number of requests received from licensed facilities for staff to be provided with notice of the auditing schedule. An announced audit program had been scheduled for a limited period at the commencement of the VP audit program to assist businesses with implementation of the standard. It was noted that the Authority proposes to conduct all its future regulatory food safety audits on an un-announced basis to ensure that each facility is audited during normal processing conditions and audit findings provide an accurate assessment of each facility. The Committee discussed some of the problems faced by their sectors with un-announced audits and the way in which audits are conducted by other accredited agencies in the sector. The Authority asked for further feedback from members on this issue.

Licensing requirements for delivered meals organisations

Following a question raised at the previous meeting on licensing requirements for delivered meals organisations who service six or more customers, a paper was tabled providing further information on measures taken by the Authority to ensure requirements of the VP Standard are met and to reduce unnecessary costs to very small operators. The Committee noted the creation of an additional category of licence and reduced fee for very small premises covered by the Standard. The Authority stressed that it recognises there is a wide range of operations in this sector and it has tried as much as possible to cater for the various sizes, skills and complexities of operations in implementing these measures.

Purchasing of higher risk foods

The Committee noted an information paper on studies overseas and within Australia linking listeriosis with pre-sliced deli meats and ready-to-eat (RTE) meat products. Members recognised that the *Listeria* pathogen is of specific concern for the VP sector in relation to product control. Members agreed that the findings of these studies reinforced the importance for operators to follow the Authority's *Guidelines for food service to vulnerable persons* to manage risks in this area.

Review of microbiological limits in the Food Standards Code

The Committee received an update on a review currently being undertaken by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) on Standard 1.6.1 of the Food Standards Code relating to microbiological limits for *Listeria monocytogenes*. The Authority will continue to participate in the development of guideline material and will seek input from the Committee on how any amended microbiological limits could be implemented. The information was noted.

Recent Listeria outbreak linked to a hospital dessert

The Authority gave an update on an investigation conducted jointly with NSW Health earlier this year into a listeriosis outbreak affecting three patients from separate hospitals which had been linked to contaminated profiteroles. This incident has highlighted the need for suppliers of these types of foods to vulnerable groups to provide prompt notification of pathogen detections to their customers. The Authority has met with HealthShare NSW to review the incident and examine menu design and approval processes for food suppliers and will circulate these findings to the Committee once finalised. The paper was noted.

Audit appeals process

Following a request for clarity on the appeals process for audits, the Authority reiterated that it encourages operators to raise any issues of concern arising from their facility audits with the auditor at the exit meeting. The move by the Authority's auditors to the use of wireless technology will also improve the audit process and interaction with facility operators. If operators have further concerns they should contact the Authority's Acting Manager, Audit & Compliance, through the NSW Food Authority's Helpline.

The next meeting of the NSW Vulnerable Persons Food Safety Scheme Consultative Committee will be held on 13 November 2013.