

CENTRAL PROCESSING UNIT INSPECTION PROJECT

The issue

Following a significant foodborne illness outbreak in aged care facilities in early 2015, it was determined that a review of the policy and procedures implemented by both the NSW Food Authority and individual facilities should be conducted.

The NSW Food Authority licenses 11 facilities as a Central Processing Unit (CPU) under the Vulnerable Persons Food Safety Scheme. These facilities produce approx. 90,000 meals per day which are distributed to various hospital and aged care facilities across NSW.

What we did

Between July 2015 and June 2016, Biosecurity & Food Safety Compliance Officers conducted in-depth inspections of all licensed CPU facilities to determine if the food safety controls being used within the industry are adequate and effective.

A project specific checklist was developed and used to determine each facility's compliance with their food safety program and with the provisions of the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code

(the Code) and *Food Act 2003* (NSW).

The project also examined the controls recommended by the NSW Food Authority's *Guidelines for Food Service to Vulnerable Persons* as well as the audit policies and procedures.

The 11 facilities were inspected with the following processing activities assessed:

- Short shelf life cook chill (n=8)
- Extended shelf life cook chill (n=7)
- Cook Fresh (n=3)
- Fresh cut fruit and vegetables (n=3)
- Vacuum packaged RTE meats (n=3)
- Frozen meals (n=2)

Nine of the facilities were inspected by two senior officers over a 2 day period with an average inspection time of 18 hours per facility. Two small facilities plating frozen foods had a 1 day inspection. These increased assessment times were required to ensure that all food processing operations could be reviewed in detail to ensure that the food

safety control systems were fit for purpose and effective.

What we found

Of the 11 facilities inspected, it was determined that:

- 45% needed to review their food safety program to better identify their food handling operations and hazard identification
- 91% had inadequately documented control measures for identified hazards
- 45% were not adequately controlling allergens within the facility.

Of the three facilities producing vacuum packaged ready-to-eat (RTE) meats, only one facility conducted pathogen testing on the vacuum packaged RTE meats on a regular basis. The level of microbial testing across the industry sector to verify the effectiveness of their food handling practices was variable with 91% of facilities having a documented testing program but only 55% conducting the testing prescribed in their food safety program.



The outcome

The inspections highlighted several areas for improvement in both the audit process and at the licensed CPU facilities.

Recommended minimum audit times have been introduced for Third Party Auditors (TPA) to ensure that they are allowing sufficient time to audit larger facilities.

Reports of each inspection were provided to the facility and those that received a marginal or unacceptable outcome received a follow up audit to ensure corrective actions were taken to fix outstanding issues. An additional review of these facilities will take place in 2017.

A number of actions identified as a result of the inspections have already been completed. These actions include (but not limited to):

- Update TPA Manuals to include information on recommended minimum audit hours. This change has been communicated to TPA's as well as to the sector

- Conduct a training session on allergens and labelling
- Develop and distribute a labelling cheat sheet
- Distribute copies of the Food Recalls and Withdrawals fact sheets as well as the Process Flow Chart.

The Food Authority is considering the introduction of mandatory microbiological testing for CPU facilities producing extended shelf life cook chill products, vacuum packaged RTE meat and texture modified foods to ensure that these processes are routinely validated as producing safe food.

Next steps

- Continue with the existing audit and verification program to ensure compliance standards continue to be met.
- Schedule in additional follow up inspections in 2017 for facilities who received a marginal or unacceptable outcome to ensure the improvements they implemented have been effective.
- Develop new education

materials and update existing ones as required which are specific to the vulnerable person sector.



Department of
Primary Industries

6 Avenue of the Americas, Newington NSW 2127
PO Box 6682, Silverwater NSW 1811
T 1300 552 406
contact@foodauthority.nsw.gov.au
ABN 47 080 404 416

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