

Food incidents, product withdrawals and recalls

How to report, respond to and prevent an incident, including how to withdraw or recall unsafe food products.

What a food incident is

A food incident occurs when concerns around the safety or quality of food (and/or feed) may require action to protect consumers.

Incidents broadly fall into two categories:

- contamination of food or animal feed in processing, distribution, retail and catering
- environmental pollution incidents such as fires, chemical/oil spills and radiation leaks

Product withdrawals and recalls

As a result of a food incident, a food product may have to be withdrawn or recalled.

A withdrawal is when unsafe food is removed from the supply chain before it has reached consumers.

A recall is when unsafe food is removed from the supply chain and consumers are advised to take appropriate action, for example to return or dispose of the unsafe food.

Reporting a food incident

If you believe food or feed you have supplied is either harmful to health, unfit for people to eat or does not meet legal requirements, you should:

- immediately withdraw or recall the food from the market
- [tell your competent authority](#) (local authority or port health authority), which will advise you of any further action you might need to take

If you believe unsafe food has reached consumers, [tell the FSA incidents team](#). (We are currently experiencing issues with new registrations. If you need to report a food incident please login as a guest.) A recall notice may need to be issued by us.

To help with this, you need to be able to identify your suppliers and food business customers.

Withdrawals and recalls guidance

Our 'Guidance on Food Traceability, Withdrawals and Recalls within the UK Food Industry' explains what the law requires and what businesses need to do.

It includes advice and best practice on:

- traceability systems
- making a decision and carrying out a withdrawal or recall
- roles and responsibilities
- how to inform consumers of a food recall

[View Guidance on food traceability, withdrawals and recalls within the UK food industry as PDF](#) (1.18 MB)

The following tools will help when carrying out a recall:

[View An example contacts template \(Annexe Ei\) as Word](#) (19.31 KB)

[View An example food incident key decision log \(Annexe Eii\) as Word](#) (18.23 KB)

[View An example template for notifying the enforcement authority \(Annexe F\) as Word](#) (20.12 KB)

[View A business to business template \(Annexe G\) as Word](#) (19.72 KB)

[View Editable allergy alert template for point of sale as Word](#) (165.16 KB)

[View Editable product recall template for point of sale as Word](#) (165.44 KB)

A quick reference guide has also been developed to further assist businesses, this complements the main guidance:

[View Quick reference guide: Food traceability, withdrawals and recalls as PDF](#) (630.59 KB)

Undertaking Root Cause Analysis (RCA)

Following a food safety incident, you are advised to undertake a Root Cause Analysis (RCA) exercise.

RCA is a method that can be used to determine how and why the food incident occurred and to help identify actions to prevent future incidents. The results of the RCA can be used to review how you manage food safety and hygiene in a your food business, including the traceability, withdrawal and recall of unsafe food.

Different methods can be used when performing RCA and you should liaise with your enforcement authority for further advice.

To help businesses understand RCA we have developed a [root cause analysis e-learning course](#).

[View Root cause analysis report form as Word](#) (132.13 KB)

[View Root cause analysis best practice example as PDF](#) (176.91 KB)

Root cause analysis - single point lessons

Root cause analysis findings have been used to identify common factors that resulted in particular types of incidents reoccurring.

Using this information, we have developed some initial Single Point Lessons (SPL) to help better target those areas where intervention will have most effect and to promote 'best practice' relating to incident prevention.

[View RCA single point lesson - metal contamination as PDF](#) (116.11 KB)

[View RCA single point lesson - salmonella contamination as PDF](#) (93.01 KB)

[View RCA single point lesson - undeclared allergens as PDF](#) (125.8 KB)

Protecting and defending food and drink from deliberate attack

The British Standards Institution has developed a user-friendly guide to help businesses if you don't have access to specialist advice in this area. This guide is designed to help food businesses and others avoid and lessen threats at all points in the food and drink supply chain.

[View Publicly Available Specification \(PAS 96\) 2017 Guide to protecting and defending food and drink from deliberate attack as PDF \(5.88 MB\)](#)

The guide can help you to assess potential vulnerabilities to fraud, ideologically motivated individuals and other 'insider' threats. There is also advice on cyber threats.

Our incident management plan

The Incident Management Plan (IMP) shows you how we are meeting our responsibilities in response to non-routine food-related incidents. The IMP will be regularly updated and will be continually tested.

[View Our incident management plan as PDF \(1.62 MB\)](#)