

Food Safety Standards – Food recall systems for unsafe food

Chapter 3 (Australia only) Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code

NOTE: The Food Safety Standards do not apply in New Zealand. The provisions of the food standards treaty between Australia and New Zealand do not include food hygiene standards.

Under Standard 3.2.2 *Food Safety Practices and General Requirements*, food businesses must have a system in place to ensure the recall of unsafe food, set out the system in a written document, comply with it and provide the document to an authorised officer if requested.

Who needs a food recall system?

Wholesale suppliers, manufacturers, and importers need a food recall system. Reasons for a food recall could include contamination of food by food poisoning bacteria, or by chemicals or foreign matter that could harm someone when the food is eaten.

If you are a **wholesale supplier, a manufacturer or an importer of food** you **must have** a food recall system in place that you can use to retrieve food from the market place if you find that the food may be contaminated in some way and be dangerous to eat after you have sent it on to other food businesses or your customers. This requirement is set out in Standard 3.2.2 *Food Safety Practices and General Requirements*. Your recall system must be set out in written form and you must follow the written procedures when recalling unsafe food.

If you are a **food service or retail business** such as a supermarket, a restaurant or a takeaway shop, you **do not need** a recall system unless you are also a wholesale supplier, or manufacturer or importer. The wholesale suppliers, manufacturers or importers are responsible for the recall of food sold at supermarkets, and food served at restaurants and takeaways is normally eaten immediately, so a recall is impractical.

However, food service and retail businesses may still have to play a part in a recall from another business. In this case certain specific requirements apply to the identification, storage and disposal of the recalled food and recalled items returned by customers. The section of this fact sheet headed 'Disposing of recalled, unsafe, unsuitable or returned food' includes further information on these requirements.

Sometimes food businesses decide to retrieve food for reasons that are unrelated to the safety of the food, for example, packaging or labelling faults, and they may choose to use their recall system to do this, although there is no legal obligation for them to do so.

The purpose of a recall system

A recall system must:

- stop any further distribution and sale of the unsafe product as soon as possible;
- tell the public and the relevant authorities about the problem; and
- effectively retrieve the unsafe food.

Key features of a recall system

A recall system should include the following key features:

- the purpose of a recall and a list of the members of the recall team and their responsibilities;
- a series of steps to guide decisions on the risks associated with the potentially unsafe product;
- a series of steps to guide decisions on the extent of the recall - for example, has the product already reached the retail level and been sold to consumers;
- a list of the authorities that are to be told about the recall, for example, the Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) and the Commonwealth and State or Territory ministers responsible for health, consumer affairs and fair trading in those States and Territories where the product has been distributed;
- records of where the product has been sent, for example to wholesalers, distribution centres, supermarkets, hospitals and restaurants; including name, address and contact phone number;
- records of information that will help other businesses and the public to identify and return the food you are recalling, for example, the name of the product, the batch code, the date mark, the reason for the recall, where to return the food and who to contact for more information;
- arrangements for retrieving food returned to supermarkets or other outlets; and
- arrangements to assess the amount of recalled food that has been returned and how much of it is still in the market place.

Guides available to help with food recalls

Two food recall guides are available free of charge from FSANZ.

The Food Industry Recall Protocol (currently under review) will help you with the things that should be done during a recall and provides more detail on the type of information that should be included in a recall system.

The Government Health Authorities Food Recall Protocol outlines government responsibilities in the case of a food recall.

Disposing of recalled, unsafe, unsuitable or returned food

All food businesses must ensure that any food subject to a recall is held, clearly identified and kept separate from other food. This is to prevent the accidental sale of the food. You must hold and keep this food separately until you receive instructions from the company recalling the food telling you what to do with it or, if it is food you have recalled, until you have decided on its disposal.

Need more information?

Copies of the standards, the guides to these and other fact sheets and supporting material can be found on the FSANZ website (<http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/>). Food businesses may also seek advice directly from the Environmental Health Officers at their local council, or from their State or Territory health or health services department and Public Health Units. Information can also be accessed through the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing <http://www.health.gov.au/>.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand
P O Box 7186
Canberra BC ACT 2610
Tel: +61 2 6271 2222 Fax: +61 2 6271 2278

Food Standards Australia New Zealand
P O Box 10559
Wellington NZ 6036
Tel: +64 4 473 9942 Fax: +64 4 4739855

Website: www.foodstandards.gov.au
Email: info@foodstandards.gov.au

Website: www.foodstandards.govt.nz
Email: info@foodstandards.govt.nz