

Things to expect from your food hygiene inspection



What happens during a food hygiene inspection?

During an inspection the enforcement officer(s) will work in accordance with the Food Law Code of Practice and Food Law Practice Guidance.

Their aim is to make sure you're meeting legal food hygiene and safety requirements and that the food you are producing/selling is safe for customers to eat.

To do this, during the visit the officer(s) will talk to you and your staff about your activities and how you manage food safety and will also look at your food safety documentation as well as assessing the structure of your premises.

During the course of the inspection, the officer(s) may take photographs, samples or swabs and if they do, they should explain to you why they are doing this.



How do EHOs judge a business?

Inspectors work to the guidelines of the food safety code of practice when conducting hygiene inspections.

They will judge your business against three criteria: Food Hygiene and Safety Procedures, Structural Requirements and Confidence in Management. Marks are made for non-compliance and added together to calculate a total score. The lower the marks, the higher the overall rating out of 5.



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Don't be afraid of your EHO!

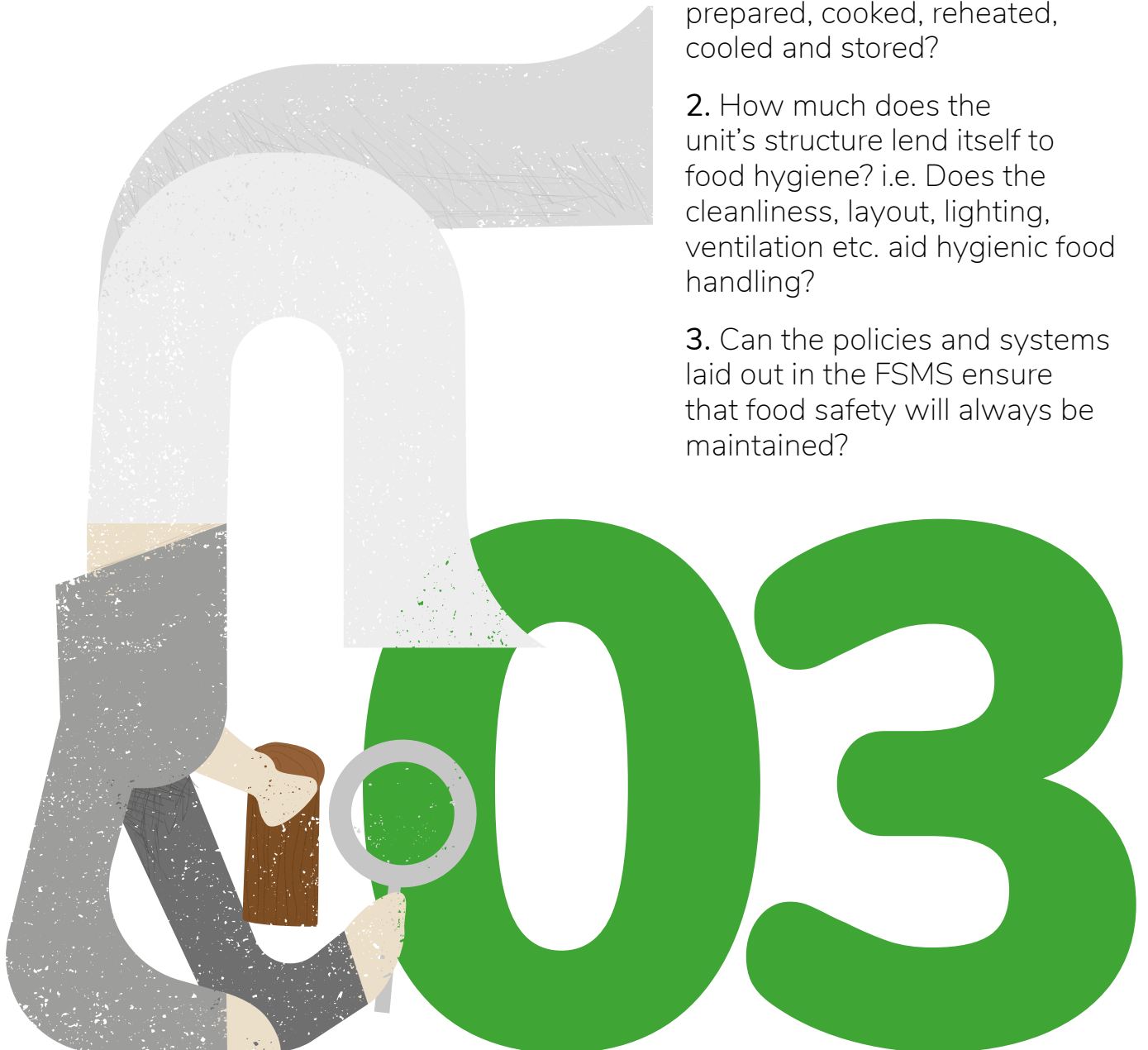
Remember, your EHO is there to provide advice.

They want to see your business succeed and they only take enforcement action when it is absolutely necessary.

What exactly will an EHO evaluate?

An EHO's job is to make sure that your food hygiene standards meet legal requirements and your food is safe to eat. To do that they'll look at:

1. How hygienically is food prepared, cooked, reheated, cooled and stored?
2. How much does the unit's structure lend itself to food hygiene? i.e. Does the cleanliness, layout, lighting, ventilation etc. aid hygienic food handling?
3. Can the policies and systems laid out in the FSMS ensure that food safety will always be maintained?



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How does an EHO go about their inspection?

To be able to issue an accurate food hygiene rating, the EHO will want to evaluate the points below.

They want to be confident in your ability to manage your food business and in your understanding of food safety management and the risks involved.

The EHO will ask your staff about your quality control systems and practices.

They'll look at every part of your premises and equipment.

They'll ask you about staff training, controlling hazards and temperature control.

They'll probably want to see your recipes, your FSMS, your maintenance and production records, temperature records and staff sickness records too. (All these documents are included in the NCASS due diligence system which you receive as part of your membership).

They might also take photographs, samples and swabs from your premises.

What will the results of an inspection be?

Your inspection will result in a food hygiene rating (scored out of 5) which will appear on the FHRS website.

If an EHO deems your food handling policies and procedures to be poor you'll likely receive a low score and you might be required to make amendments before you can continue to trade.

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What hygiene rating should you be aiming for?

Every NCASS member should be aiming for the top score of 5 to maintain the high standards for food safety that NCASS is so proud of (well done guys!).

Anything under a score of 3 is really very undesirable – but you can always improve it over time if you take the right action.

To help caterers prepare for food hygiene inspections, we provide assured advice and guidance including inspection checklists and accredited training packages.



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What could happen if an EHO thinks there's a problem?

They will write informally to you outlining the contraventions they witnessed and provide you with a timescale in which to rectify them. The EHO will exclude any food handler from working if they are suffering from a food-borne illness or infectious disease.

A EHO might serve an improvement notice if breaches of the law have been identified, which formally instructs you to correct the issues.

The officer may discuss with you voluntary procedures to help rectify contraventions – this might include voluntary surrender of food rather than formally seizing or detaining it, or a voluntary closure of your premises. Instead of serving a Hygiene Emergency Prohibition Notice (see below). This means that your business will be formally closed but the voluntary closure means that a notice won't be placed on the door.

They might serve a Hygiene Emergency Prohibition Notice if there is an imminent risk to consumers. A Hygiene Emergency Prohibition Notice can be used to stop the use of processes, premises or equipment.

An officer might recommend a prosecution which could result in the prohibition of a process and/or use of premises or equipment, fines or event imprisonment. You may also be banned from running a food business in the future.

If an officer advises you to do something they must make it clear whether you need to do it to comply with the law (legal requirement), or whether they are recommending it as good practice only (therefore not a legal requirement). The officer must give you a reasonable period of time in which to carry out required work, except if there is an imminent risk to public health.

What should I do if I receive an improvement notice?

Take immediate steps to comply.

Keep the EHO up-to-date with your progress and contact the Environmental Health Department immediately if you're not able to comply within the specified time.

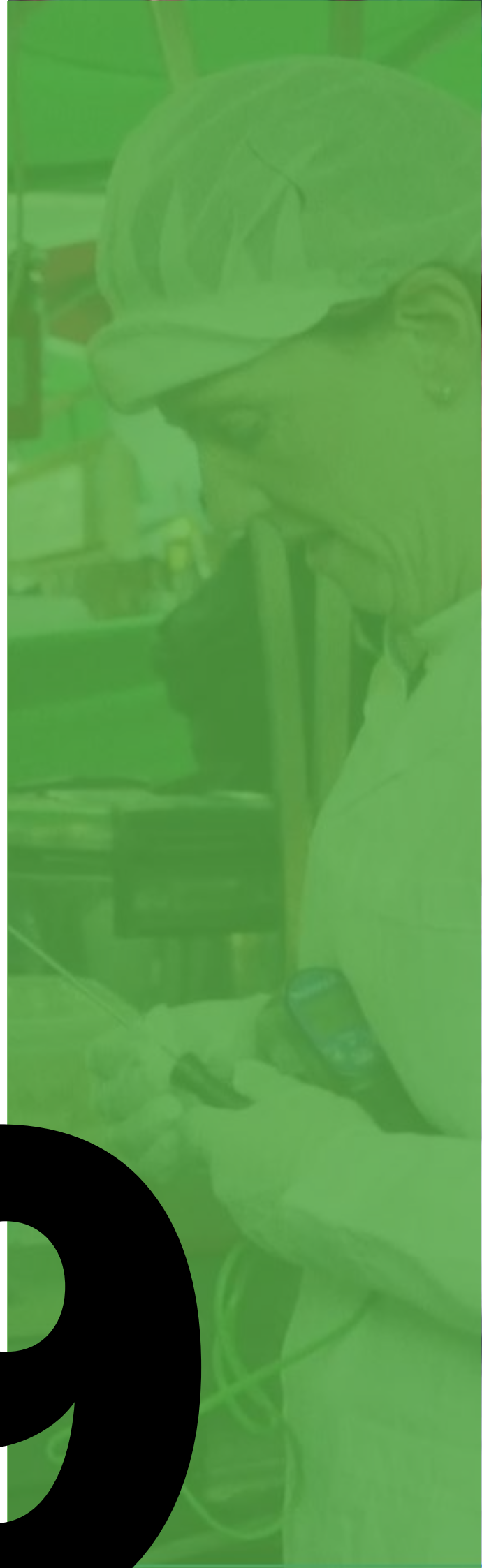


What if you think the outcome is unfair?

First, contact the food safety team manager at the local authority which your business is registered with. They'll try to resolve the problem informally but if you're still unhappy and if you're an NCASS member, you can refer it to us in writing so we can advise you.

You also have the right to appeal to a Magistrate's Court against an improvement notice and against a local authority's refusal to lift an emergency prohibition order. If the court deems that the premises has been shut/food has been seized without proper reason, you'll have the right to compensation.

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Receiving your Food Hygiene Rating

The officer who undertakes your food hygiene inspection will always try and advise you of the score you have been awarded under the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme at the end of the visit and provide you with your new window sticker. However, there may be occasions when they need to consult guidance for example and cannot give you your rating there and then.

If this does happen the officer must notify you in writing of your score within 14 days of your inspection and again provide you with your new window sticker. Remember, there are safeguards in place under the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme including an appeals procedure, a request for a revisit for a re-score or the opportunity to post a 'right to reply' comment. Your enforcement officer should be able to explain all of this to you if you ask.

Your checklist for hygiene inspections:

- Completed, signed & dated food safety management system
- Completed allergen information table
- Adequate hand washing facilities
- A means for drying hands
- A food preparation sink
- A suitably equipped first aid kit
- A probe thermometer
- Fire protective equipment – extinguishers / fire blanket
- Proof that you've registered your business with the environmental health department
- A clean, tidy, safe and easily-cleanable workspace that doesn't provide access to pests or places for bacteria to multiply
- Adequate ventilation
- Adequate refrigeration for storing high risk products
- Appropriate cleaning equipment
- A means for disposing waste
- A means for temperature control & segregation (if transporting)
- Portable hot and cold water of drinking quality
- Good personal hygiene (you and your staff)
- Protective clothing – head coverings are advisable though not compulsory
- Evidence of food segregation i.e. raw and cooked foods
- Evidence of hygiene training (for you and your staff)



NCASS members get extra support

As an NCASS member you're part of our Primary Authority Partnerships with the Royal Borough of Greenwich (England) and Monmouthshire Council (Wales).

NCASS has agreed standards for you to work to and they're set out in your welcome pack. If you follow the advice in your membership pack, you are working to NCASS's agreed standards.



"The information support and platform NCASS supply to new or well established caterers is amazing and make life so much easier. I honestly feel we wouldn't be where we are today without the business support NCASS offer."

Discover more at www.ncass.org.uk
