

Food temperature

# Laws

What you should know



# Temperature control of Food



Food temperature controls were brought into effect by the Food Safety (Temperature Control) Regulations 1995, now incorporated into the Food Hygiene Regulations 2006.



## National Provisions

The 1995 and 2006 Regulations are intended to be de-regulatory, i.e. less prescriptive than previous legislation.

Although implementing some of the provisions of the EU directive on the Hygiene of Foodstuffs (93/43/EEC), the specific temperature requirements are only national provisions, and are subject to change, if and when the EU decides on maximum chill and hot holding temperatures to be applicable in all Member states.

## Identification of Food Hazards

The main provisions of the Regulations, as they effect caterers, are summarised in Figure 1. The first apparent difference from previous requirements is the disappearance of the list of relevant foods requiring temperature control.

The requirement now mentions food likely to support the growth of pathogens or the formation of toxins. The intention is that food businesses themselves should decide which food needs to be held under temperature control, using the identification of food hazards as required under the Food Hygiene Regulations 2006.

However, guidance issued by the Department of Health, giving advice on the types of food that are likely to be affected by these requirements, shows a strong similarity to those foods previously relevant, mentioning certain dairy products, cooked products containing meat, fish or eggs, etc, smoked or cured meat and fish, ready-to-eat foods and uncooked or partly-cooked pastry and dough products.

## General Chill Exemptions

As in previous legislation, there are certain exceptions to the general chill holding requirement. Canned and dried foods are exempted as long as they remain in hermetically- sealed containers or remain dry.

Once cans are opened or foods are rehydrated, the contents may then be subject to control if they are likely to support the growth of pathogens. Certain foods, normally sold within a short shelf-life from premises on which they are made, such as some bakery goods and sandwiches, whose quality rapidly deteriorates to an unacceptable extent within a very short period, do not need temperature control. In this case, the tolerance outside of temperature control should not normally exceed four hours, unless a properly completed hazard analysis justifies a longer period.

Food such as certain soft cheeses may be ripened at ambient temperatures, but once ripe, must be kept under temperature control as the pH will have increased at the end of the ripening process to an extent where the growth of organisms such as *Listeria* can take place.

## Temperature control and food handling

Besides the time-limited exemptions to allow for the uncontrolled display of foods on buffets, etc., mentioned in Figure 1, there are also certain exemptions to allow for the practicalities of food handling during normal catering operations.

These allow for food to remain outside temperature control for short periods, consistent with food safety as follows: during loading and unloading from vehicles for transfer to and from premises, during de-frosting or temporary breakdown of equipment, and whilst handling food during and after processing or preparation. As a general rule, a single period of up to two hours outside temperature control is unlikely to be questioned.

## Special storage conditions

One potential problem with the Regulations is where a manufacturer or supplier has given a special storage condition for an ingredient or product, especially where the specified storage temperature is below 8°C. If this lower temperature is necessary for food safety reasons, then the product must be kept at that lower temperature, and failure to do so could result in an offence being committed even if the product is kept at or below 8°C.

The problem facing caterers is knowing whether a specific temperature is given for food safety purposes or simply for quality

reasons. Many such recommendations are present in order to maintain food quality over the shelf-life of the product. It would be helpful if manufacturers could arrive at a commonly accepted form of words to be used on labels to indicate whether any recommended temperature is given for food safety rather than quality considerations.

## Due diligence

The overall effect of the Regulations on catering practices is only slight as far as the practicalities of temperature controlled food storage is concerned, apart from the complication that could be caused by low specific temperatures on a limited number of products, provided the main provisions are adhered to (please see figure 1).

However, proper attention will need to be paid to monitoring practices. Not only will monitoring be necessary to demonstrate "due diligence" with the requirements of these Regulations, but all caterers will find that correct temperature control will be a critical step identified in the hazard analysis of their operation. It is now a legal requirement that such critical steps are monitored under the Food Hygiene Regulations 2006. Caterers will therefore come under increasing pressure to provide accurate and meaningful temperature records.



# Check Lists

## Temperature Control for Catering Operations

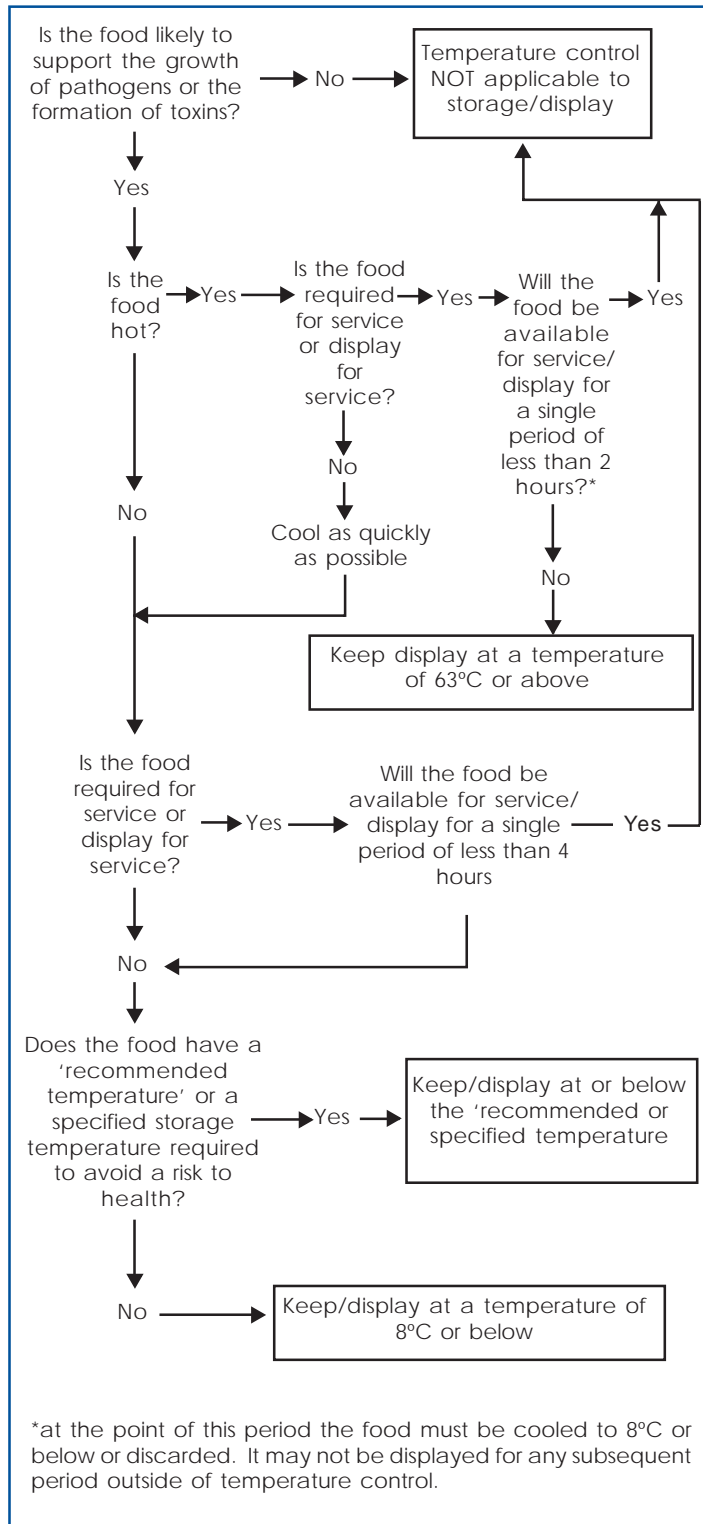


Figure 1

Foster Refrigerator recommend you use this checklist as a basis for selecting future refrigeration requirements

- Does the equipment meet current and future temperature and environmental legislation?
- Review your current needs and choose the size of the cabinet to fit. Under-filled or over-filled cabinets are uneconomic.
- Never cram a cabinet into a restricted area. Good air circulation is essential for efficient operation.
- There is no "general-purpose" refrigerator. Different foods demand different temperatures. If you can have only one, choose a model that operates below 5°C.
- Busy kitchens get hot. Ensure the cabinet is designed to work in surroundings up to 43°C.
- Ensure there is ducting as well as a fan to maintain a uniform temperature and fast recovery after door opening. Self-closing doors are best.
- Make sure there is automatic defrosting: manual defrosting is a chore easily forgotten as well as being inefficient.
- Refrigerators must be seen to be working- a highly visible digital temperature display cannot be ignored.
- Ensure the cabinet is tough and easy to clean, on castors so you can clean round it easily too. Choose stainless steel or heat-reflecting aluminium for lower running costs.
- The inside should be sealed, with rounded corners for improved hygiene and removable shelves and supports.
- Always ensure that the cabinet is CFC-free - both insulation and refrigerant. You don't want to be caught out using a banned refrigerant gas the first time it needs a service.

## Government Publications

The Chilled & Frozen Food Guidelines 1989  
 The Food Hygiene Regulations 2006  
 Available from: The Stationery Office, [www.tsoshop.co.uk](http://www.tsoshop.co.uk)

## Other Foster Blue papers include:

- Energy Efficiency
- The ECA Scheme
- Hydrocarbons in Refrigeration - What caterers need to know
- The Climate Change Levy
- Food Temperature Laws
- Food Safety and E. Coli
- Food Hygiene and Staff Training
- Handling and Serving Ice
- Safe Food Storage
- HACCP- Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points
- The Safe Way to Blast Chill Freeze and Thaw
- Inspection by Environmental Health Practitioners
- Plan for a Catering Crisis
- Coldrooms Panels, Polyurethane Foam & Fire Ratings: An Update

For copies of our other Blue Papers, visit [www.fosterrefrigerator.co.uk/food\\_safety](http://www.fosterrefrigerator.co.uk/food_safety) or call 0500 691122



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