

Guidance on emergency situations in food businesses

This guidance has been produced to help food businesses in the Bath and North East Somerset area. It can be used as a reference for when you have found issues at your business.

This guidance does not cover all situations that can happen at a food business. We have to assess each situation on a case-by-case basis – depending on the issue, the risks involved and what actions you are able to take, we may recommend that you close your business voluntarily to prevent any risks to consumer health.

Our officers carry out routine food hygiene inspections of local businesses. If the officer finds an imminent risk to health at your business, you can be served with a Hygiene Emergency Prohibition Notice that legally requires you to close the business or stop a certain activity.

When you have found an issue, you should make sure all relevant staff are aware of it and if they need to do anything differently. You should keep a written record of when you were aware of the issue, and what actions you've taken to address it. These records can be shown to the next officer who inspects your business.

If there is an issue that may mean you have to close your business, you can contact the Food Safety team for advice during Council office hours on 01225 477508 or public_protection@bathnes.gov.uk.

You must ensure you have all relevant permissions to carry out works at your business – for example, Building Control, Planning and Listed Buildings consents.

Lack of hot water

Food businesses must have a constant supply of hot water for safe food handling and preparation. Not having hot water means you can't effectively wash your hands, or clean equipment and surfaces.

Do not turn off your hot water supply overnight, as when turned on in the morning you may not have a suitable supply when you do begin trading. You should only begin handling food and cleaning tasks when you have hot, constantly running water available.

If your boiler breaks down, you should call out an engineer as soon as you can. Gas boilers must be maintained and regularly checked by a registered gas safety engineer. Electric boilers should be checked by a qualified electrician or heating engineer.

A temporary hot water supply can be provided in some cases, if your normal supply breaks down. Examples would be a counter-top hot water boiler, a kettle, or a pan of water simmering on the stove with containers to carry the water. You must make sure that any water you do use for hand washing and cleaning is mixed with cold water to an appropriate temperature. Staff should not be at risk of being scalded by hot or boiling water. Pans should not be overfilled or carried across kitchens or up

and down stairways, as this also can present manual handling and/or slip and trip risks.

If your dishwasher unit has broken, you can use a sink with hot water available to clean equipment. Your hand wash basin(s) should be kept separate from this, and you must make sure there isn't a risk of dirty equipment contaminating food and other surfaces.

If you have had issues with your hot water but think you can provide a temporary supply, you should contact us for advice and to make us aware of the issue. If you can't ensure you will have hot water available at all times, you should not be handling any open food until this has been addressed.

You can check if your gas safety engineer is properly registered and authorised to work on your system at:

<https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/find-an-engineer-or-check-the-register/>

Pest issues

Pests spread disease through their fur, droppings, urine, and saliva – Pests must not be allowed into any areas where food and food equipment are being handled and stored. Pests go to the toilet often and can contaminate surfaces by moving across them – surfaces and equipment may need to be cleaned even if you can't see any dirt, droppings or residue on them.

You should be carrying out your own routine checks for signs of pest activity; do not leave these checks for your pest contractor to do. If you don't clean up dirt and droppings from pests, it can be difficult to tell if there has been further activity in areas you found them.

If you find signs of pest activity in the food areas of your business, you must take immediate action to ensure customers' health is not harmed. This should include:

- clean and disinfect any areas where food is handled and stored. Remove any dead pests, droppings and other debris (e.g. egg cases).
- make sure the food areas of your business are pest proof. This may include filling holes or gaps in your business' walls, floors and ceilings. Any gaps under external doors should not allow pests to enter your business.
- throw away any food you think may have been in contact with pests. Look for signs of packaging being damaged and activity on shelves.

You may need to temporarily close your business until the issue has been addressed.

You should call out a pest control contractor if you find signs of pest activity. If you don't use a pest contractor, we'd recommend you do this temporarily until the issue has been resolved. This is because you may need specialist knowledge to address

more serious infestations. The issue may need specialist bait or poisons – these should only be sourced by trained pest controllers. You should make sure any contractors you use are competent.

The Council offer pest control services for local businesses:

<https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/environment/pests-and-infestation>

The Safer Food Better Business pack has information on safe pest control practices.

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/sfbb-cross-contamination-06-pest-control.pdf>

Fridge and freezer breakdowns

'High risk' perishable foods must be stored at safe temperatures – these include products using meat, dairy and fish. In catering and retail businesses these must be stored at 8°C or less, or in line with the manufacturer's instructions on the label (whichever is lower).

If your fridge or freezer is not working effectively or has broken down, there is a risk of high-risk food being stored at unsafe temperatures. If the unit's display is showing a high temperature, you can check the temperature of the food inside with a calibrated temperature probe. This should be placed between two packages or containers; this can be more accurate than the unit's display.

If the food has been above a safe temperature for **more than 4 hours**, it should be thrown away. If the food has been in the unit for **less than 4 hours**, it can be moved into another unit if that unit is able to hold the food at safe temperatures. The food should be used directly from this unit and must not be stored at higher temperatures again.

You may be able to adjust the unit to make it colder. If you can't do this, do not use the unit to store high-risk foods. You may need to call out a refrigeration engineer for maintenance and repairs.

Once the unit has been adjusted, make sure the unit comes down to a safe temperature for the products that will be stored inside. This will be 8°C or less for fridges and chillers (2-5°C is recommended), unless certain products have to be stored at lower temperatures. Freezers should be holding food at -18°C or less.

The FSA's Safer Food Better Business pack has guidance on safe chilled storage practices:

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/sfbb-chilling-01-chilled-storage-and-display.pdf>

Gas incidents

If a gas appliance has been fitted or serviced incorrectly, there is a risk of gas leaks, fire, explosions, and carbon monoxide poisoning. **If you smell gas, you must take immediate action.**

You can find information on what to do in a gas emergency at:

<https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/gas-emergency/what-to-do-in-a-gas-emergency/>

You can find a Gas Safe registered engineer, or check that your contractor is properly registered at:

<https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/find-an-engineer-or-check-the-register/>

Product recalls

You may be contacted by a suppliers about a product they are recalling. Product recalls can happen because:

- the product may be contaminated with harmful bacteria (e.g. Salmonella, E. coli or Listeria) or chemicals.
- manufacturing problems mean there may be something in the product that shouldn't be there, such as pieces of plastic or metal.
- the product may have incorrect labelling, and may be missing key information for the consumer (e.g. allergen information, or cooking instructions).

You must follow the instructions your supplier has given you.

If you believe that your business has supplied food or drink that may be harmful to people's health, unfit to eat or doesn't meet legal requirements, you must contact us as soon as you can at 01225 477508 or public_protection@bathnes.gov.uk. You may need to begin your own product recall.

If the food or drink has reached consumers, you should report this to the FSA's incidents team at: <https://reportanincident.food.gov.uk/>

The FSA have guidance on product recalls and withdrawals at:

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/food-incidents-product-withdrawals-and-recalls>

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/sfbb-management-07-product-recall.pdf>

Waste accumulations

If you don't have enough waste storage available or your waste contractor has missed a collection, waste can start to build up at your business. Overflowing bins and bags of waste left on the ground can attract pests, and cause nuisance odours. You can be also fined by our Cleansing Enforcement team if you are not storing your

waste properly, or if you aren't disposing of your waste through an approved collector.

Waste should be put into bags first, before being put into a lidded bin. The lid should be able to be kept closed. You may only be allowed to put out your waste for collection at certain times of the day. Waste must not be stored in areas where food is handled.

You may need to request an extra bin from your waste contractor, or ask for a larger bin. If your contractor has missed a collection, you should contact them about this and keep a written record that this has happened.

The Council also offer waste collection services for businesses. You can find more information on this at: <https://beta.bathnes.gov.uk/business-waste-and-recycling-0>

Flooding

Flood water can be heavily contaminated with sewage, harmful bacteria and other pollutants. If your business has been flooded, you must check if any food handling or storage areas have been affected. Do not prepare or store any food in these areas – any equipment that might be used must be deep cleaned and disinfected first. Any food that has come into contact with flood water should be thrown away – you should check with your waste contractor how this should be done.

Depending on the issue, your business' main water supply may have been affected. If you have concerns about the quality of your water supply, you should contact your business' water supplier.

The Food Standards Agency have produced guidance for consumers on Food safety after a flood:

<https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/food-safety-after-a-flood>

Drainage issues

If you have noted an issue with internal or external drainage at your business, you should speak to a plumber and may need to arrange a call out.

If drains inside your business aren't working, you need to check whether this presents a risk of food areas being contaminated with dirty water. Food should not be handled in areas where building and plumbing work is taking place. Once any leaks have been fixed, you should clean and disinfect the affected areas.

If drains outside your business are blocked, you may need to contact the local water and sewerage company. In the centre of Bath, this will usually be Wessex Water who can be contacted at: <https://www.wessexwater.co.uk/help-and-advice>.