

FOOD SAFETY - THIRD-PARTY FOOD VENDOR REQUIREMENTS



Food safety is increasingly critical following recent incidents of illness and fatalities linked to contaminated snacks in schools.

In the effort to maintain an acceptable standard concerning third-party vendors, the person responsible for ensuring that a vendor or contractor complies with the terms of the agreement, often tends to get lost in a sea of criteria and legal requirements.

It is therefore essential that a pre-designed document be used to ensure that all the i's are dotted and the t's are crossed.

For ease of reference, you can [*download an example PDF template here.*](#)

In a previous article we discussed [*Third-party food vendors and employer responsibilities*](#) in the context of food safety, in this article we will discuss elements that should be included in a Third-Party / Food Vendor form or check sheet.

Elements to be included in a Third-Party Food Vendor form or check sheet

The scope of work, as defined in the service level agreement or 37(2) agreement, should be the primary consideration as it would provide the necessary information to determine which sections should be monitored.

For example, in the case of a Contractor or Vendor appointed to produce and sell food items to the company's employees, several elements need to be monitored. These elements include, but are not limited to, Hygiene in the workplace, Food storage, Housekeeping and Staff training. It is the responsibility of the compliance officer, or OHS representative, to identify these elements.

Firstly, information will be required to identify the Vendor and the period to which the check sheet is applicable, as well as information regarding the person representing the Vendor/Contractor and the company's representative. Both these representatives should, ideally, be persons of authority within their respective organisations.

Following these determinations, the specific functions should be broken down per activity, and criteria established for each function. For example, consider the following:

Third-party vendor housekeeping activities:

Waste Management

- All discarded food or other products placed in a closable bin
- Bins emptied immediately when full.
- No rubble lying on the floor.

Workplace Hygiene

- All surfaces are tidy.
- Surfaces cleaned and sanitised after each mealtime rush.
- No dirty clothes lying on top of the preparation station.

Facility Housekeeping

- All food items in storage are within the expiry date.
- No odour in the food storage areas.
- No cooked food is stored with raw foods.

It is important that the criteria are aligned not only with the relevant legislation, but also with the S.M.A.R.T principles which would allow both organisations to be clear regarding their requirements and expectations.

Remember, the legislation sets out the minimum requirements, but each organisation is allowed to set stricter criteria, provided that it does not infringe upon any other legislation.

Contractor Management

By setting clear expectations and implementing approved safety, ergonomics and hygiene systems, with standard, at minimum monthly, monitoring sessions, the Contractor or Vendor can significantly reduce the risk of food-related illnesses. Companies are entitled to require the Contractor or Vendor to present such a system, and if it is not available, to halt or deny work as non-compliance may result in an astronomical increase in the risks posed to the company employees.

Conclusion

With the increase in risks relating to food safety, such as the death and illness of scholars as discussed in our previous blog, as well as the discovery of warehouses with expired food items (Mabaso, 2024), it has become critical for organisations to use Third-Party Vendors to tighten the screws to the point where compliance is ensured.

SERR Synergy assists businesses with Occupational Health and Safety compliance by developing the necessary risk assessments, policies, documentation, training and support. Our team of OHS Professionals can relieve the stress and concerns that might affect your business's ability to remain operational.

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