

Victoria's Food Safety Audit System

The Food Act 1984 requires that:

- A food safety audit be conducted at declared interval(s) to determine whether a food safety program:
 - has been complied with during the period covered by the audit; and
 - is still adequate at the date of the audit; and
- The food safety audit of the food safety program must be conducted by an approved food safety auditor certified as competent to conduct an audit of such a premises.

The food safety audit system has been developed to provide assurance that food safety auditors certified under the Food Act 1984 are working in a consistent and reliable manner, thereby upholding Victoria's reputation as a provider of safe food.

Who has to be third party audited?

All Class 1 food businesses (formerly class A businesses) where food handled or sold is high risk ready to eat; handled prior to sale; and to be consumed predominantly by at-risk/vulnerable populations will be required to be audited. These businesses include hospitals; aged care facilities, childcare facilities and meals on wheels kitchens.

Any other business that chooses to develop their own independent food safety program must also be 3rd party audited.

However, businesses other than Class 1 can also choose to develop their food safety program from a State registered template and instead of having a 3rd party audit will have a compliance check by local government.

Who is an approved Food Safety Auditor?

Auditors must be registered with the Quality Society of Australasia (QSA). They then apply to the Secretary of the Department of Human Services to be an approved Food Safety Auditor.

Where do I find an approved Food Safety Auditor

The Department of Human Services will keep on the public record a register of approved food safety auditors. This register can be accessed by visiting Food Safety Victoria's website www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety

A person cannot perform the duties of a Food Safety Auditor under the provisions of the Food Act 1984 unless they have a current certificate of approval issued by the Secretary to the Department of Human Services.

How often do I have to be audited?

The Secretary of the Department of Human Services establishes the frequency at which audits should be held.

If you are a Class 1 food business your initial audit is to be not more than 6 months from 2 January 2002 and then not more than an interval of 12 months between each audit thereafter.

If you are a Class 2 food business your initial audit must be conducted at an interval of not more than 12 months from the first registration or renewal of registration after 2 January 2002 and then not more than an interval of 12 months between each audit thereafter.

What are non conformances

A non conformance is a food handling practice that is found not to comply with specified requirements which includes requirements documented in the food safety program or the requirements of the Act and/or Food Safety Standards.

The non conformance is critical where a serious or imminent risk to public health identified. That is, if the food, practice or situation has compromised consumers' health, or if allowed to continue, will compromise consumers' health.

The non conformance is major where the potential impact is likely to compromise food safety if no remedial action is taken to correct the non conformance within a specified period (7 days or less).

What are my responsibilities?

Your responsibilities will be to engage the services of an approved auditor, ensure a copy of your FSP and records are on the premises at all times. All relevant documentation that supports your FSP must also be available for the auditor to view.

At the end of the audit the proprietor of the business is required to forward to Council a copy of the audit certificate within 14 days of the audit. The Council will need this certificate to register the business.

What is Local Government's Role?

Local government retain the responsibility for registering food businesses under the Food Act 1984 and conducting an annual inspection of all registered food premises, including those that are 3rd party audited.

Unless the Secretary of the Department of Human Services makes a specific exemption, Environmental Health Officers must not conduct, or assist in conducting, a food safety audit of any food safety program for any food premises within the council's municipal district.

Councils have a significant role to play in the management of the audit system that includes:

- enforcement where regulatory action is required, including prosecution;
- enforcement of audit frequency compliance; and
- investigation of complaints made against food businesses.

What are the auditor's responsibilities?

The auditor will assess whether your food safety program is adequate and will check that the business is following all parts of the food safety program. The auditor is required to provide you with a Audit Report should any non conformances be identified and negotiate with you the time periods for them to be rectified.

Should the auditor identify any critical non conformances then the auditor has a legal obligation to notify the relevant Council within 24 hours.

At the end of an audit the auditor is to issue an audit certificate to the business.

How much will it cost?

The cost of auditing your FSP is negotiated between the business and the auditor. It is expected that a business will enter into a service agreement with an auditor prior to an audit commencing.

Where can I get information?

Contact your local Environmental Health Officer or the Food Safety Victoria Hotline on 1300 364 352 or the Food Safety Victoria website www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety Also look for food safety auditors in the yellow pages – ask for their registration certificate from the Department of Human Services.