

Lakes Food Newsletter



Issue 6/June 10

Welcome...

.....to the sixth issue of the Lakes Food Newsletter. This autumn we have come across mouse droppings in a large number of food premises so we have included some information on preventing rodents from entering your premises and what to do if they still get in. Mice carry a number of diseases, which is why keeping them out of your kitchen and dealing with potential contamination effectively is an essential part of your hygiene practices. If you have any feedback on the contents of the newsletter or have suggestions for future issues please contact us on 03 4500 300 or enquiries@lakesenv.co.nz

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Trap that grease

Virtually all food premises use fats and oils in their kitchens and every commercial kitchen should have a grease trap. Fats and oils are ingredients in most styles of cooking, although usage is particularly high where foods are fried or deep-fried. Some cooking methods, like rotisserie and grilling, even result in the production of fat. Grease left on plates, cutlery and cooking utensils is washed into the drains. Disposing properly of used fats and oils is very important, as solidified grease can combine block pipes and cause back-ups. Situations that are both unpleasant and potentially expensive. High levels of fat and oils have an adverse effect on wastewater utility operations and lower their effectiveness and increase maintenance cost. Grease traps prevent oil and fat from entering the wastewater disposal system. The three most common types of grease traps available are: passive grease traps, grease converters and mechanical grease separators:

Passive grease traps

These are normally found outside your premises. Located in the ground, they are often covered by metal plates. They work by cooling down waste water causing the fats and oils to float to the surface of the water. Other solid material, such as food scraps, sinks to the bottom of the grease trap. The fat on top and the solids on the bottom of the grease trap need to be removed regularly. This is done by sucking up the entire contents of the trap. At the same time the inside of the grease trap should be hosed down to clean the sides. Cleaning the trap should be done regularly – the frequency will depend on the type of business and how much fat is going into the grease trap. Generally this is done by a contractor, who will be able to advise you and put you on a regular cleaning regime.

Grease Converters

Conveniently found under or near the wash sink inside your kitchen, grease converters work by using enzymes and bacteria to break down the fats and oils. Both the bacteria and enzymes need to be added each night to top up the grease converter. It takes five hours for the converter to do its job and it must be kept warm to work effectively. Normally hot water from the washing process is sufficient, but if your grease converter is outside it will need to be insulated. Grease converters need to be cleaned out once a year. After cleaning a special start up procedure is required to get the numbers of bacteria and enzymes back to the correct levels.

Mechanical grease separators

Mechanical grease separators are also often found under a bench inside the kitchen. They work by skimming liquid fat from the surface of the waste water inside the separator. A heater inside the separator ensures the fats and oils form balls which are collected by the skimming wheel. The fats and oils are drained into a container on the side of the separator. The fats and oils can then be collected along with other used fats and oils for recycling. This container should be emptied every day.



Munching Mice

In the last couple of weeks we have been spotting evidence of mice in quite a few kitchens and storage areas, so it seems a good time for a reminder on how to prevent mice from entering your premises and how to get rid of them if they do find a way in.

Keep your yard clean and tidy. Stacks of cardboard and packaging, vegetation etc provide hiding places and runways for mice. Overfilling bins and waste spillage will attract mice into the area.

Mice are very nimble on their feet: they are able to run up a vertical surface as long as there is some texture, they can jump up 33 inches from the ground onto a flat surface and can run along horizontal wires, pipes or ropes. They can squeeze through the smallest gap - a crack or hole of just over half a centimeter width is enough to provide a way in. Seal openings with a strong, smooth material, such as cement or metal.

Keep your dry goods storage area clean and well organised, so that signs of mice can be easily detected. Avoid storing food in materials that mice can chew through. Decant food from cardboard and paper packaging into glass or thick plastic containers.

It is a good idea to set out traps or bait stations in areas that are likely to appeal to mice - for example in dark corners and around the hot water cylinder. These must be regularly monitored so that they are reset or replenished as necessary.

If you do spot mouse droppings in your premises clean these up immediately and sanitize the area as well as any containers, cans etc that may have been contaminated with droppings or urine. Set out sufficient traps or bait stations so that you can eliminate the mice quickly. Traps should be placed at right angles to the walls where activity has been spotted, as the animals usually travel along walls. Peanut butter, dried fruit or bacon are effective as baits.

Wear gloves when removing dead mice from traps and place them in a plastic bag before putting them in the rubbish bin. Disinfect traps before resetting them and thoroughly wash your hands with soap and warm water.



Norovirus

Norovirus usually comes to our attention in reports of outbreaks in hospitals, resthomes or other institutional settings. Social gatherings such as camps, weddings and funerals are also common scenarios for outbreaks. Sporadic cases don't make the news but are nevertheless a concern.

The illness is spread when people ingest virus particles contained in vomit and faeces. This can be directly from person to person, e.g. via unwashed hands; by food, water or ice that has been contaminated by a sick person; or by contact with contaminated surfaces, such as taps, door handles and soft furnishings.

One of the reasons norovirus is able to spread rapidly is that it is highly contagious - as little as 10 particles can be enough to infect someone. The illness has a rapid onset and a relatively short duration (24-60 hours). Projectile vomiting and explosive diarrhoea are characteristic symptoms, but cases may also complain of headache, stomach cramps, fever and lethargy.

Any staff members who have experienced symptoms must stay away from work for at least 48 hours after recovery. Even then they may still be carrying the virus and good personal hygiene, in particular hand washing, is essential. A food worker who has close contact, i.e. lives in the same household, with a person who has symptoms of norovirus infection should also stay away from work for 48 hours.

The virus is very persistent in the environment. It can survive for weeks on surfaces, taps, door handles, flooring, furniture etc and can endure temperatures from freezing to 60°C. Hence thorough cleaning and sanitizing of potentially contaminated areas is crucial in preventing the spread of infection. Special care must be taken if cleaning up vomit as airborne droplets will have travelled meters. Gloves and if possible a gown or apron should be worn during the clean-up. After cleaning with water and detergent the area must be sanitized with a bleach solution. Gloves must be disposed of and any laundry washed on a full hot cycle, then machine dried.

The most effective method for preventing the spread of the virus is hand washing. Thoroughly washing hand with soap and warm water, then drying them on paper towels greatly reduces transmission from person to

Are you VIP?

The new Food Bill is still on track for commencement in 2011, and it is likely that Food Control Plans will become a requirement from July 2011. Food premises in the service sector, i.e. restaurants, cafes, takeaways and caterers are able to get ahead of the changes by implementing a Food Control Plan voluntarily now.

The Food Control Plan (FCP) includes step-by-step guidance on food safety procedures, checklists and forms for recording regular activities, and a diary where unusual events and follow-up actions can be recorded. The focus is on controlling the risks involved in preparing and selling food, to ensure that you are producing safe food. Once you are up and running you will be provided with a certificate of participation, which demonstrates your commitment to food safety and can be used as an advertising tool.

Food operators who have already opted to operate their premises under an FCP have reported that the plan is particularly useful as a staff training tool and reference point for staff. This could be especially valuable in our area where the rate of staff turnover is exceptionally high.

FCPs are available free from the Lakes Environmental team and come with a digital thermometer and some other useful material. Implementing the plan in your premises is not difficult - by filling in the gaps and ticking a few boxes it is tailored to your premises. To make it even easier Lakes Environmental has got together with the Southern Institute of Technology (SIT) to provide a free training programme for people interested in the FCP. If you decide to go ahead and get your premises on to the new system we will cover the cost of the course materials.

For more information on Food Control Plans please contact Mary Rose Fitzgerald on 03 4500335 or maryrose.fitzgerald@lakesenv.co.nz. To enquire about the training course contact SIT on 0800784748