

How to Run a Healthy Business

Packaging & Labelling

What is packaged food?

Food that is in bottles, cans, jars, boxes, containers and packets is packaged. Also, any food that you provide to the customer that is wrapped or covered (eg paper, glad wrap, foil wrap etc) and/or put in a container (eg takeaway container, foil tray, cardboard box etc) and/or put in a bag (eg paper, plastic etc) **is packaged**. This means any food packaged by you on your premises.

Under the Food Act 1984, food must meet the requirements of the Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) Food Standards Code. One of the things covered by the Code is labelling of food and this generally applies to packaged food.

Note: Some labelling requirements also apply to foods that are not packaged, for example **mandatory warning and advisory statements and declarations**. Some of these will apply to restaurants ie in their use of storage containers or when certain information about a food must be made available to the customer.

How are packaging and labelling requirements checked?

Your Environmental Health Officer (EHO) will check whether you are meeting these requirements as part of the regular visits to your business.

Also, on a random basis samples of different foods are purchased and checked that they meet with the labelling and packaging requirements for that food.

Under the Food Act 1984 it is an offence if you do not meet the labelling requirements. This can lead to Council taking legal action and fines of up to \$200,000.

Examples of packaged food

- ✓ A platter of sandwiches covered in plastic cling **is packaged**.
- ✓ A business that puts bulk coffee beans into bags for the customer **is packaging**.
- ✓ Food served from a display, from storage or directly cooked and put into a disposable container or bag for the customer to take away **is packaged**.

Any form of packaging that comes into contact with the food must be safe. It is important that the materials used to package food are **food grade**.

Packaging material

Food grade packaging is produced and handled in such a way that the packaging will not contaminate the food in any way.

Packaging material can contaminate food in three ways.

1. By releasing chemical substances into the food. Only certain plastics, papers, metals, ceramics etc are suitable for use with different foods, those that are not can contain poisons that can get into the food. These poisons can make people sick and cause cancers.
2. If the packaging material contains micro-organisms, dirt or other foreign material that can be transferred to the food.
3. If parts of the packaging itself break off into the food, for example broken plastic or glass.

This also applies to food that you store.

Please turn over



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How do I know if packaging material is suitable for the foods I handle/sell?

For all types of packaging - foil wrap, plastic cling film, greaseproof paper, plastic or paper bags, cardboard/plastic/foil items such as containers (including take-away), straws, cups etc - check with the supplier or manufacturer of the material for the following information:

- ✓ that the packaging is known to be safe to use for food;
- ✓ what types of foods that can safely come into contact with the packaging material, eg, acidic foods or fatty/oily foods;
- ✓ what temperature settings the packaging material is suitable to be used for, eg, room temperature storage, refrigeration, freezing and micro-waving, dishwasher safe; and
- ✓ whether the packaging material can be reused.

Examples of items that are not suitable for use in contact with food include:

- ✗ rubbish bags (clean or not);
- ✗ rubbish bins (clean or not);
- ✗ newspaper;
- ✗ disposable items, that have already been used such as takeaway containers, ice-cream containers; and
- ✗ any thing that has been in contact with glass, dirt, insects/pests, or chemicals.

What food is labelled?

Food that is already packaged when the customer makes their choice in most cases will need to be labelled.

Whether food is labelled generally depends on when the food was packed. Was it before or after the customer chose the food to buy? If the food was wrapped or packaged before the customer had the opportunity to select the food to buy then the food must be labelled.

Example of labelling requirements

Referring to the example of a business that puts bulk coffee beans into bags for the customer. Does the packaging require a label?

YES If the coffee beans were pre-packaged, before the customer selected them, then a label IS required.

NO If the coffee beans were selected by the customer and were then packaged in front of them, then a label is NOT required.

Do I have to label?

Some foods are generally **exempt** from some of the labelling requirements and these include:

- food that is not packaged;
- food in an inner package that is sold in an outer package, except individual portion packs, which contain substances that must be declared;
- food made and packaged from the premises from which it is sold;
- food packaged in front of the purchaser;
- whole or cut fresh fruit and vegetables, (except sprouting seeds eg alfalfa), where the nature and quality can still be seen through the packaging;
- food delivered packaged, and ready to eat, as ordered by the customer;
- food sold at a fundraising event.

Please note; even when exempt from displaying a label certain information about a food **MUST** be available to the consumer. Eg Information covered by **Mandatory warning and advisory statements and declarations**. In a restaurant situation this could mean verbally advising the customer or writing it on the menu.

For further information refer to the 'Labelling Requirements' fact sheet and the FSANZ website www.foodstandards.gov.au