

# Food complaints

## Crawley Borough Council



No matter how good a manufacturer or supplier of food is, there will be occasions when something goes wrong and the food sold is not acceptable to the customer.

## Who should I complain to?

### ***When to complain to the shop, manufacturer or supplier***

Your first port of call should always be the manufacturer, supplier or shop from which you bought the food. A prompt complaint to the retailer or manufacturer will ensure that the manufacturer can recall (if necessary) any product and that your complaint can be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Examples of where you should contact the manufacturer include:

- You are not fully satisfied with the product and you merely want your money back. Most large supermarket chains have an efficient quality control and complaint procedure to enable customers to return an unsatisfactory food complaint and obtain a refund. The supermarket logs these complaints and refers them to their suppliers, who can identify trends resulting in remedial action.
- The complaint is not of a serious nature e.g. a part of a pea pod in a can of peas, or a 'flat' carbonated drink.
- You are not sure when and where you purchased the product, or you are not sure where and how you stored it.

### ***When to contact the Environmental Health Service***

The Environmental Health Service will deal with food complaints that **pose a public health threat**. The Environmental Health Service does not get involved in any compensation claims. Claims are a civil matter that you must take up with the manufacturer and courts if necessary.



#### **Environmental Health will deal with:**

- Unfit food e.g. decomposing meat, food poisoning (Salmonella etc)
- Food that is so contaminated that it could not reasonably be eaten, eg. heavy mould growth and cheese.
- Food which contains a foreign object, e.g. a bolt in a loaf of bread.

## Taking Action

In order for the Environmental Health Service to take formal action there will have to be:

- A public health risk
- A good chain of evidence
- The company concerned does not have a reasonable defence as to why the incident happened
- Action complies with the Council's Enforcement Policy

If formal action is pursued you will be asked to make a witness statement and you may have to give evidence in court.

If the council does not take formal action we will write to you explaining why and you will be asked if you want your details to be released to the company concerned, so that they can contact you directly.

### ***When to contact Trading Standards***

Trading Standards also investigate food complaints. The type of complaints that they deal with are:

- Chemical contamination of food and improper use of additives
- Composition of food e.g. sausages must contain a minimum percentage of meat
- Adulteration of foods

- Labelling offences, and misleading claims
- Quality and nature of food e.g. Cod sold as Haddock

## Common Food Complaints

The Environmental Health Service receives hundreds of food complaints each year. The following are the most common complaints we receive with the action you should take:

### Tinned foods

**Insects:** Occasionally small grubs may be discovered in canned vegetables. These are commonly found in sweet corn and tomatoes. The grubs are in fact the larvae of a moth. They live inside the kernel/tomato and so are impossible to see before processing. They are killed and sterilised by the canning process. As the use of pesticides decreases, the incidence of these pests will increase.

- No public health risk
- Action: Contact retailer/manufacturer



**Wasps & Fruit Flies:** These are common in tins of fruit. They are naturally associated with ripe fruit and do not carry disease.

- No public health risk
- Action: Contact retailer/manufacturer

**Struvite:** Naturally occurring elements commonly found in fish may develop into hard crystals during the canning process. These crystals may be mistaken for glass fragments and are called struvite. It is not harmful and will be broken down by stomach acids if swallowed. It is especially common in tinned salmon. Struvite crystals will be dissolved if placed in vinegar and gently heated...glass will not.

- No public health risk
- Action: Contact manufacturer, or **Environmental Health if glass**

**Mould:** Dented, damaged or incorrectly processed tins may allow mould growth to occur. This could indicate an error in production or storage.

- No public health risk
- Action: **Contact Environmental Health**

### Fish

**Codworm:** White fish such as cod or haddock may be infested with a small, round brownish yellow worm. These are found in the flesh. They are killed by cooking and are harmless to humans. The affected parts of the fish are usually cut away, but some may be overlooked.

- No public health risk
- Action: Contact retailer/manufacturer

**Luminous marine bacteria:** Luminous bacteria can sometimes be found on seafood. Seafood such as crab- meat, cooked shrimp, prawns and simulated seafood products made from surimi are the most common seafoods associated with luminescence or glowing. When seafoods glow it means that luminous bacteria are present. This suggests that the seafood was held for a time at a temperature that allow bacteria to grow. It does not mean the seafood is unsafe or of low quality. There are no reports of illness from luminous marine bacteria growing on seafood.

- No public health risk
- Action: Contact retailer/manufacturer



## Meat

**Skin, bone, etc:** Products made from meat and/or poultry may contain small bones, skin or parts of blood vessels. These are unsightly but rarely a health hazard as they are normal parts of the original animal.

- No public health risk
- Action: Contact retailer/manufacture



## Vegetables & Fruit

**Stones, soil & slugs:** Fruit and vegetables commonly have soil, stones or small slugs adhering to them. This is quite normal as they originate in the soil.

- No public health risk
- Action: wash fruit and veg thoroughly

**Greenfly:** Salad vegetables, especially lettuce, may have greenfly attached. This is becoming increasingly common as the use of pesticides decreases. Greenfly are difficult to wash off but they are not harmful. In fact they demonstrate that the salad is fresh.

- No public health risk
- Action: no action required



Note: Mould growth will naturally occur when fruit and vegetables become damaged and bruised. This will be minimised if the buyer checks the produce before purchase.

## Baked Goods

**Bakery Char:** Bread and cakes may contain bits of over cooked dough which has flaked off from bakery tins. It is not necessarily an indicator of poor hygiene, although they could be mistaken for rodent droppings. Rodent droppings are black and a regular torpedo shape, while bakery char is greyish and comes in uneven shapes.

- No public health risk
- Action: Contact retailer/manufacture

**Carbonised Grease:** The machinery used to produce bread and cakes is lubricated with a non-toxic vegetable oil. Occasionally some may become incorporated into dough giving areas of the product a grey/greasy appearance.

- No public health risk
- Action: Contact retailer/manufacture



**Insects:** Dried products such as flour, sugar and pulses may contain small insects such as psocids (book lice). These do not carry disease, but they eat through the paper of the packet. They breed very quickly in warm, dark, humid conditions, so can spread into uncontaminated food very quickly.

- No public health risk
- Action: Throw out all affected food, clean cupboards with bleach solution and dry thoroughly. Store new dried goods in airtight containers and ensure good ventilation in storage areas.

## Chocolate/Confectionery

**Bloom:** Chocolate may develop a light coloured bloom if stored at too high a temperature. It is not mould but is due to fat separation. It is not harmful.

- No public health risk
- Action: Contact retailer/manufacturer

**Crystals:** Large crystals may form in confectionery and may be mistaken for glass. The crystal will dissolve in warm water.

- No public health risk
- Action: Contact retailer/manufacturer



### ***Do's and don'ts when making a complaint***

#### **Do**

- Keep receipts (not essential but helpful)
- Obtain the exact name and address where the food was purchased
- Keep the food in the wrapper and container
- Keep perishable food under temperature control (especially if your complaint involves decomposition or 'off' smells and tastes)
- Read the label for best before and use by dates, and instructions for use. If you use food that is out of date, or in a different manner that is required by the instructions you can expect problems.
- If you are unhappy with the response from the manufacturer and you believe your complaint posed a public health risk then contact the Environmental Health Service

#### **Don't**

- Be tempted to handle or pull out any foreign object found in the food - leave it in place.
- Put the food in a place where further deterioration or contamination could take place (e.g. keep it in the fridge but separate from other foods)
- Throw away any of the food or packaging.