

The mark of confidence

Food safety doesn't just concern what we put in our mouths. It also involves a range of non-food products that are used in the production process. We caught up with Clive Withinshaw, Director of HACCP Australia, to discuss best practice in this area.

Food & Beverage Industry News: We see the HACCP Australia and HACCP International mark on an increasing number of products. Can you tell me something about it? What does it represent and how does it benefit food companies?

Clive Withinshaw: HACCP Australia is a food safety and food science company which provides a variety of services including food safety and Non-GMO auditing, consulting and product certification.

In answer to your question, HACCP Australia (with its overseas arm, HACCP International) operates a product certification scheme called 'Food Safe Equipment, Materials and Services'. This is aimed particularly at non-food products which are used by the food industry and have incidental food contact or a significant impact on food safety or proper operation of a food safety management system.

The world's leading HACCP and food safety schemes and quality systems - particularly those endorsed by the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) - have developed rapidly over the last 15 years. They are very demanding and have high expectations concerning all facets of food safety.

In the early days they rightly concentrated on ingredient risks. That expanded to include packaging and logistics and they now encompass the risks that come from plant and equipment.

The world's best food safety schemes have recognised and are emphasising the fact that many of today's recalls are caused, not by ingredients or process, but by physical and chemical contaminants.

Essentially, food businesses now have an obligation to mitigate the risk from this source with an auditable due diligence process. Provided they have the necessary skills, they can do this themselves. Alternatively, they can rely on 3rd party certification.

This latter option is becoming



more popular because the risk analysis isn't easy and the industry has an expectation that suppliers be involved in the process.

Essentially our scheme is designed to meet that due diligence requirement and provide both the buyer and seller with confidence as to the product's fitness for purpose.

Often the suppliers of these key products supply multiple markets. They too need assurance that the products that they supply to this specialist food sector are appropriate. I'm talking about things like kitchen wipes, lubricants, cleaning and pesticide chemicals, flooring, and lighting. Fine they might be, but 'fine' in an engineering shed is not necessarily 'fine' in a food plant.

F&B: How does the evaluation process work?

CW: There are a number of international certifications that address individual characteristics, such as food contact material or cleanability, as stand-alone criteria.

Ours is different in that we apply a risk analysis and have 10 key criteria that need to be satisfied prior to certification. In addition, we look at toxicity, batch and quality control, consequence of error, labelling, instructions and claims. Each product needs to pass each criterion and it has to make a contribution to food safety.

F&B: Who does the evaluation and where?

CW: HACCP International and HACCP Australia employ a number of highly experienced and qualified food scientists - both here in Australia and overseas - who are devoted to this scheme.

Depending upon the nature of the product or service, we will examine the product itself as well as, where necessary, the quality system that supports it and the on-site performance.

Products continue to be evaluated after certification and service providers are audited. It can be an extensive process and can be demanding on the product.

F&B: What is the pass/fail rate?

CW: Many of the larger companies do manufacture really good products. It is no surprise to me that the more expensive and better designed and made of these have the least problems. These people have invested in food safety.

Others struggle. I would estimate that no more than 50 per cent of applicants pass first time. However, they do often re-engineer. That is great to see and shows a commitment to our industry. In some sectors failure rates can be higher.

F&B: Can you give me an example?

CW: Lighting is a good one. Many food businesses are very aware of the possible foreign body contamination from lighting products - historically there has been a risk of falling nuts and bolts (or of course glass) over production zones.

The lighting industry has addressed glass but we now see many products with heat dissipating design which makes them impossible to clean and a great pest harbourage. So instead of glass falling into our food, we now have dead insects!

The makers of lights that do

carry our mark, such as Thorn and Zumtobel, have really thought about their application in the food industry.

F&B: What about the standards?

CW: We have a number of both public and proprietorial standards against which products are evaluated and expectations for a vast range of products that have been developed over the last 15 years.

It has been a significant investment. HACCP International is a JAS-ANZ accredited product certifier and all our systems meet the requirements of ISO 17065 (the standards for product certification).

We are just about to release a new standard titled 'Pest Management Services for Food Businesses'. Hundreds of hours have gone into its development governed by an impartial committee of stakeholders comprising retailers, food safety auditors, food processors and pest managers.

It is a world first in publically available standards for this sector. There are many 'guidelines' but our industry isn't keen on 'guidelines'. 'It is or it isn't' is what we like!

It is available from our website at no charge and gives the food industry a really useful tool as well as an understanding as to what pest management companies that carry our mark have been audited against. It is also designed to capture all the requirements of all the international best practice and GFSI standards.



Clive Withinshaw, Director of HACCP Australia.

F&B: Is your scheme popular overseas? If so, where and why?

CW: We now undertake more product certification business outside Australasia than we do within.

It's great that an Australian company has joined the ranks of exporters in a sector which isn't one of, what I call, the '4C' club – carbon, cattle, crops and cabernet!

We have staff and offices in Hong Kong, Singapore, the UK and now in the US.

While there are a number of international schemes, ours seems to have become very popular in certain markets. Among other reasons, I think this is because of the holistic nature of the certification and the alignment with best practice standards.

In Europe, for example, food contact products need, among other

things, EU1935 compliance. But that in itself only addresses the material, not the design. Our scheme obviously requires the same but so much more. Furthermore, it is conducted in a way that the QA department in a food business would expect.

F&B: Can you give me some examples of products and what you look for?

CW: Anything that has an impact on food safety but particularly those that have incidental contact or present a great risk.

Gloves are a good example. I am of the school that would rather my food was handled by a clean hand than a dirty glove, but if it is to be handled by a clean glove, we need to know what that clean glove is made of.

There are some really nasty gloves out there made from totally

unacceptable material. A thin slice of the food handler's flesh in my sandwich would be only slightly less palatable than certain glove material we have come across!

Kimberly Clark, MCP, RCR, Oates, Edco, Prochoice and The Glove Company all make some excellent products in this area. Others are listed on our website. If they are just slightly more expensive – there's a reason.

Pest management chemicals are an unavoidable material that all food businesses need to some extent. Our certification ensures that they are all food-safe and fit for purpose.

There can be a temptation for controllers to use cheaper (or what they might call 'more effective') chemicals. Our certification mark ensures that this can be controlled.

The certification not only covers the product but also such things as the application method, instructions, quality control and allergens. Bayer, BASF, Bell, FMC and Syngenta are examples of manufacturers which have products that are particularly appropriate for the food market.

Our certification not only examines such products but also determines in which 'zones' they are appropriate. 'Primary Food Contact' or 'Splash and Spill' zones, for example, are indicated on the certification.

Flooring and walling is another product group we commonly see. Everybody knows that mistakes in these can be really expensive in terms of fit out and disruption. Our evaluation process can really help industry specifiers when selecting a food safe surfaces and hardware.

Roxset, Flowcrete, Altro, Ucrete, Clifford, Sika, Bethell, BlueScope and Blucher come to mind, but once again there are others on our site which have all invested in the food industry's needs.

F&B: Who should those in the industry contact if they want to know more about the certification and how you do things?

CW: We really encourage food safety and quality managers to talk to us about certified products – especially when they are making purchasing decisions or if they need to know what we have looked at or how we did the evaluation.

They can usually speak to the evaluation scientist directly and, while much of the information we hold is confidential, we can usually satisfy technical enquiries. That can be a really useful for a QA or HACCP Manager.

A really effective, auditable, due diligence process is now an absolute for food businesses operating to world's best practice food safety standards. Our scheme can really help in that way.

I did hear of a production director of one of the large Australian food processors who said, "If it doesn't have that mark on it – you better have the facts and my express permission to bring it in otherwise".

That's one way of doing it!



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