

Industry Insights: Food Hygiene in Waterstones



CASE STUDY:

Waterstones





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As a leading UK training provider, we're committed to helping businesses and their staff achieve high standards of food hygiene. Over 450,000 learners have received food hygiene certification from us, which provides them with the awareness they need to prepare and serve food safely.

We often check in with our customers to see how they benefit from this training. Recently, we got in touch with Waterstones – one of our long-term customers – who purchase our food hygiene training for their Café W staff. Our aim was to learn about how important our training is to them and how it helps them achieve success.

Waterstones shared with us some excellent first-hand experience about the importance of food hygiene awareness, so we thought we'd also share it with our readers. It should give you an insight into high standards of food hygiene in practice, which hopefully inspires you to follow Waterstones' positive example.

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A BACKGROUND ON CAFÉ W

To give customers a place to relax after browsing the store, Waterstones originally integrated high street cafés into various branches. However, after recognising the popularity of coffee shops and wanting to take ownership of this side of their business, they eventually introduced their own chain in 2012, known as Café W.

They now have 72 Café Ws around the country, which have a strong focus on ethically-sourced coffee, locally-supplied food, and high-quality customer service. Their bespoke cafés have a bold identity, aiming to be the perfect place to enjoy a brew after buying a good read.

This success doesn't come easy to cafés, though. Anywhere that prepares food and drink, including cafés, must have high standards of food hygiene if they want to earn customers' loyalty and trust. This requires a consistent commitment to food safety measures, and Waterstones is a prime example of following these practices by the books.



WATERSTONES' WORDS ON FOOD HYGIENE PRACTICES

Despite being primarily a bookstore, Waterstones treats its food hygiene responsibilities with the utmost importance. We interviewed Becky Oljanuk (bookshop manager of the Leeds branch) and Akilah Manneh (Health and Safety Project Coordinator) to learn about why they deem food hygiene as important as they do in Waterstones and what they do to uphold it.



WHY FOOD HYGIENE IS IMPORTANT TO WATERSTONES

Becky and Akilah talked to us about what specific food hygiene risks their cafés face and why they have such rigorous controls in place. Akilah stated that: "Food hygiene is a key priority for our cafés and we endeavour to have safe and effective practises at all times. We are well aware of the implications if the proper standards aren't complied with."

In particular, they discussed their focus on training, cross-contamination, ready-to-eat food, pest control, allergens, their food hygiene ratings, and how they prepare for EHO visits.

FOOD HYGIENE TRAINING

On the topic of training, Becky told us that "Everybody who works in the café and every bookseller does [High Speed Training's] Food Hygiene training so that they can go in, and Café W [also] have their own Food Hygiene health and safety training that they have to go through."

She stated that training everyone – not just those specifically working in the café – enables other staff to jump in during busy times without putting food processes at risk. Clearly, they have a strong commitment to proper food hygiene procedures. They recognise how strongly it benefits their café and how important it is to protect their customers' wellbeing.

As this training provides certification, it helps them demonstrate compliance at all times. "We keep everyone's certificates [...] So, if an EHO walked in and booksellers were in there working behind the counter, we would need to be able to show their certificate as well in just the same way."



If you did not have your Food Hygiene certificates to hand, you would instantly be able to access any training records through our easy-to-use Learner Management System and evidence your compliance during an inspection.

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READY-TO-EAT FOOD

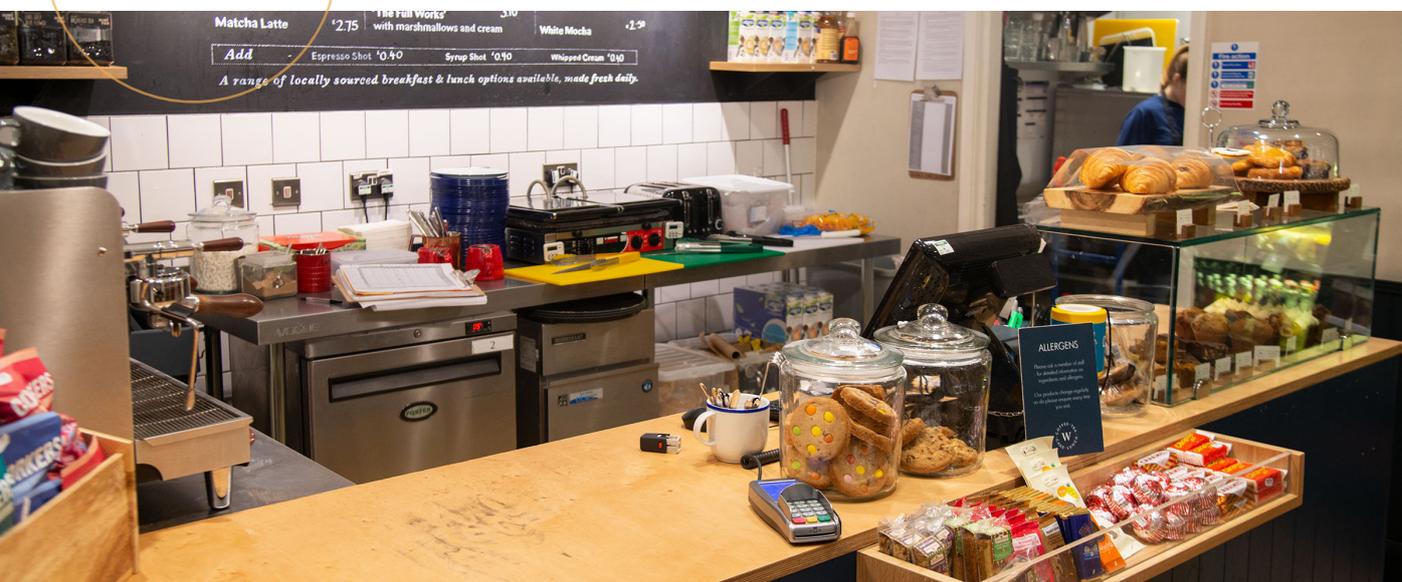
Becky also said that many of their branches “have to make their own sandwiches, so they are handling real food. They are handling meats and other things that you wouldn’t necessarily expect in a café because they are making their own food rather than getting it delivered in. So, if you didn’t have the food hygiene safety, there would be a quite a large risk factor.”

The fact that Café W often makes their own sandwiches is indeed a large risk factor. Ready-to-eat food requires careful handling and proper holding of ingredients. Otherwise, it could easily become cross-contaminated or spoil, and put their customers at significant risk of food poisoning or an allergic reaction. Their recognition of this risk indicates that they take their café’s safety seriously.

ALLERGENS

With 44% of British adults having at least one allergy, it’s no wonder why controlling allergens is a focus of many UK food establishments. Waterstones is particularly aware of how important preventing allergenic contamination is. In our interview, Becky said: “With allergens now it’s really important that everybody is knowledgeable on [food hygiene safety]. I know a lot of people with allergies and if there is an instance of something bad happening or a bad experience they will never go back and they’ll tell their friends not to.”

With allergenic safety and other risks in mind, their food safety management procedure is incredibly thorough. This commitment is what helps many of their Café W branches gain a five-star food hygiene rating.



THE IMPORTANCE OF GAINING A 5 RATING

The food hygiene rating system, as determined and published by the [Food Standards Agency](#), reflects the standard of a business's food safety practices. A food establishment can receive a rating between 0 and 5. Businesses with significant violations to food safety may receive a zero, while a five indicates that the premises has excellent standards.

The Leeds, Albion Street, branch of Waterstones has a food hygiene rating of 5 for its Café W. On the topic of acquiring ratings, Becky told us that she "used to work in a different café and even if your fridge temperatures are not to the right temperature you will get a 4 unless everything is in line. You won't get a 5."

Achieving a 5 is not easy, as Becky highlighted. Establishments must demonstrate an exceptional and consistent commitment to all 3 key areas (hygienic food handling, physical conditions of the building, and food management systems) in order to attain a 5 food hygiene rating. After all, EHOs can arrive at any time unexpectedly.

"I think it's a badge of honour really." She said. "A 5 shows that you are a 5 all the time." Thanks to Waterstones' attention to detail and commitment to following best practice, many of their branches have managed to attain it. This shows that they really do maintain a high standard consistently.

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It's a badge of honor really; a 5 shows that you are a 5 all the time.

Becky Olanjuk - Leeds Branch Manager

Sending this message to customers plays a huge part in gaining their trust in your business. We live an era where people are more aware of food safety than ever before.

"When we first started bringing the cafés in, we realised how much competition there is with different cafes, so having a five-star food hygiene in and everybody fully trained is a big part of the experience really." Becky said.



Waterstones clearly recognise just how valuable this rating is for showing that their café performs just as well or even better than their competition. They also recognise how important it is for showing their café is trustworthy in its own right and that it takes its safety responsibilities seriously.

"We are relatively new into the café business, so it's really important that we have that rating to show that it is not just booksellers making coffees. It's not just any retail assistant, it's something that stands alone rather than just being a café in a bookshop."

Their dedication to consistently maintaining these high standards is how they manage to gain and retain their 5 ratings. It means they're prepared for any EHO visit.

HOW WATERSTONES PREPARE FOR EHO VISITS

When an EHO visits a food establishment, they can arrive unannounced at any reasonable time. A business must allow them to inspect their premises, so they can determine whether they're following appropriate food safety practices. Because Waterstones are so committed to doing so, they're always prepared for an unexpected EHO encounter.

Becky told us that: "The café team have a daily checklist that they have to work through, so that's things like fridge temperatures, general cleanliness, they have the cloths that are different colours. [...] There's daily from the café guys, weekly from the managers, monthly from the book shop managers and quarterly from the external auditors."

These thorough practices are a prime example of due diligence. Checking everything on a daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly basis means that everyone is in the habit of working hygienically. It promotes a solid culture where everyone knows the importance of following procedures and keeping a record of it.

It's therefore clear that Waterstones recognises the importance of a proactive rather than reactive approach, which is ultimately what every business should aim for.

Akilah said that: "We are always trying to be one step ahead of any enforcement visit." During their mini audits, their café development team are even stricter with scorings to push their standards as high as possible, which in turn makes them fully prepared for an impromptu EHO visit.



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WHAT CAN YOU LEARN FROM WATERSTONES?

When we asked Akilah for some advice on attaining a 5, she listed the following key elements: “Meticulous paperwork, regular checks, keeping up to date with current legislation, a strong, experienced café team along with great attention to detail.” These are indeed crucial to consider, so how can a business achieve such a high standard?

Some of the most vital factors Becky and Akilah emphasised include:



How committed your business is to its food hygiene practices and a solid routine.

With their daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly checks, Waterstones leave absolutely no room for standards to slip.



Paying close attention to major risk factors,

including fridge temperatures, cleanliness, cross contamination, allergens, and pest control.



Keeping clear records of their process.

Managers ensure that they check and sign off inspection documents so everything is accounted for.



Properly trained staff,

who understand how to follow food safety procedures and can apply this in practice.

“Pest control, allergens and cross contamination are all monitored closely with new ways of working and regular training provided to staff.” Akilah said.

It’s therefore clear that an important foundation to lay is staff training, as it enables staff to follow these closely-monitored processes. All of Waterstones’ staff receive external and internal training: the external training covers important legal standards that staff must follow and any legislative changes that occur, while the internal training covers their café’s specific processes.

With this groundwork in place, staff can uphold the rigorous safety process. They help Waterstones achieve their strong food hygiene ratings and keep customers returning to Café W like their favourite book. Their approach and attitude is one that more food establishments should aim to adopt if they want to see greater success in their business.



In preparation for an EHO inspection, you may want to use our [Self Inspection Checklist](#) to help you complete a mini-audit in your premises.



For any questions, please get in touch and we will be happy to help.

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