

How to prepare for your EHOs' next visit in less than 30 minutes

Insider tips on developing a better working relationship with your EHO and improving your Scores on the Doors rating.



How to prepare for your Environmental Health Officer's next visit in less than 30 minutes

The visit of your Environmental Health Officer (EHO) need not be a stressful event.

This guide has been put together to help you prepare for an EHO inspection. It should also help you establish a better working relationship with your EHO, and improve your inspection scores or ratings (including Scores on the Doors)

Information contained is taken from real senior Environmental Health Officers and from our own experiences in over 20 years in the catering industry.

We've also used an official EHO inspection and audit guide as used by EHOs on every visit.

Let's get started.

There are 3 crucial areas

Area 1

Your premises

Area 2

Food Safety Management System

Area 3

Food safety procedures and practices



Inspection point 1

The first thing an EHO is going to look at is the overall picture of the business; the visible clues to the likely hygiene standards of the premises.

So before your next inspection, get a friend or colleague to walk the business, from the street right through the business. Honesty is the key word here, so ask them to be frank, even brutal, over what they see.

Why bother? When you work within a business every day, you can become 'blind' to things. You don't always notice problems your potential customers will.

He or she is looking at:

- Is it clean?
- Is it in a good state of repair?
- What state are the drains in?

They are thinking:

Let's take a look out the back. And how is the waste looking, is it tidy or a complete disgrace? Remember at this point, they haven't yet stepped in your front door.

A great phrase a friend of mine once said was:

"How you do anything is how you do everything"

Your EHO is likely to think exactly the same; if the outside is in a poor state, it's highly likely that the interior is poor as well.

So here's our first top tip



Top tip

Tidy and clean outside the premises, get it all looking smarter

The reality is that you won't get as closely scrutinised inside if your outside looks half decent.

Inspection point 2

So now they have walked into your premises.

The very first thing they are likely to check once inside is, Have you got HOT potable water?



If not, or it isn't hot on the day, your in trouble. If there's a problem, have this seen to straight away as this is a potential immediate failure point.

You will be temporarily closed down if you do not have hot water immediately available.

Inspection point 3

After checking your hot water, your EHO is likely to ask to see your Food Safety Management System incorporating HACCP principles.

This is becoming a really important issue and you are likely to be asked for this immediately. Don't have one or got one but paperwork not exactly up to date? We can help you on this issue and we'll talk about this a bit later on.

Your EHO is going to want to see a working, ongoing documented Food Safety Management System. Not just a few fridge and freezer temperature monitoring forms, although these are incredibly important. A few forms doesn't mean your have a fully functioning Food Safety Management System.



Top tip

Get a proper Food Safety Management System. The Safer Food System is the Fastest and Easiest way to implement and manage your own system. It can save you a lot of time, money and heart ache.

Inspection point 4

Next inspection point is your premises. Your EHO will look at whether your walls, ceiling, floors, doors and windows are potential hazards. Are they fit for the purpose of producing 'Safe Food'.

Have you got separate wash facilities including hand washing, food preparation, cleaning and disinfection.

Don't forget the whole point of their inspection of you, your staff and your business is; can you produce safe food for eating. That's it.



Top tip

Work with your EHO, it's as simple as that.

Get them involved, talk to them, invite them into your business. This may sound counter intuitive but they will respect you for asking, because 95% of all other food businesses won't do it.

This gives you a significant advantage simply because your EHO is there to help you improve and wants you to get 5 Stars on 'Scores on the Doors'

Why would you want 5 stars?

We are in a recession inevitably customers are watching where they spend their hard earned money.

When many people go out for a meal or take away, perhaps they are now out only once a week instead of the 2 or 3 times it used to be.

Simply put, people are going to be more careful and more discerning about where they eat.

Given the choice between a food business that has 5 stars and one that has 2 stars for food hygiene, which one would YOU go to?

Working in collaboration and partnership with your local Environmental Health Officer is going to help you achieve this.

When you do get your Scores on the Doors' certificate, make sure you put it on your front door or window, so all your customers can see it

NB This assumes you have a good score. If not, ask your EHO how you can improve your score and they will help you with free advice and guidance.

Inspection point 5

What is the work or process flow of your kitchen like?

If you're unsure quite what we mean, work flow refers to how well designed your premises are for efficient, safe food production.



If you have a good (food safe) work flow, it's going to help you massively with avoiding cross-contamination and possible food poisoning of your customers.

Your EHO is going to look at whether deliveries can be put away quickly and easily.

Are the deliveries of fresh food next to your waste area and bins?

Are your preparation areas of raw and high risk food next to cooked and ready to serve food?

Are your staff going to have to make trips from preparation areas to and from fridges and freezers, that will add to food being left out in the danger zone for too long?

Top Tip

One of the MOST common reasons for food poisoning is food being in the danger zone too long.

- A) Food is prepped too far in advance**
- B) Food is cooled too slowly**

So therefore if you can address these two factors by having an efficient kitchen process or work flow, you are going to help yourself enormously.

Your EHO is going to look at this when they are in your kitchen.

Top Tip

Ask your EHO. What they would do? Get them to make recommendations. They are going to tell you simple effective proposals, making it really easy to implement.

Inspection point 6

Do you understand what a Critical Control Point is? How about Critical Limits?

Do your staff know?

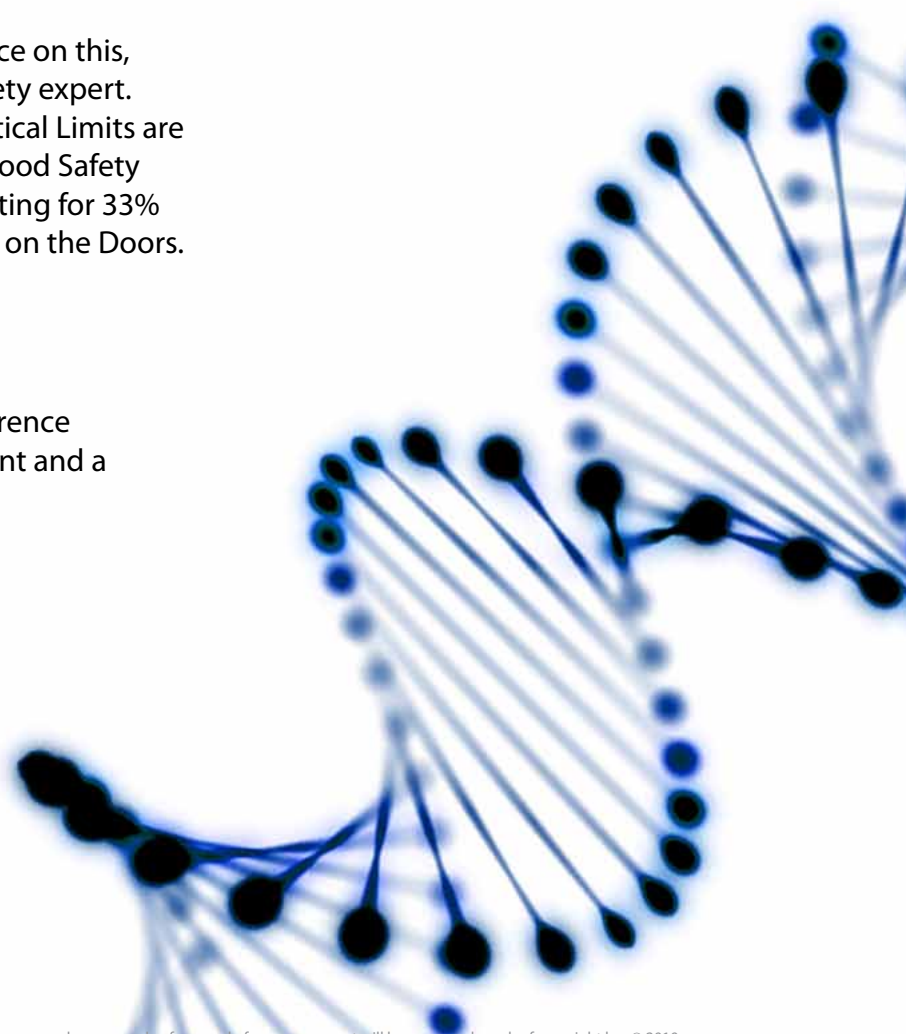
These are issues your EHO is becoming more and more fanatical about. A lot of people don't know and the ones that do, many don't document them consistently or appropriately.

Before your EHO visits, make sure you know where your critical control points are in your food business, that you know the critical limits at each critical point and they are written down.

If you need any help and advice on this, you need to talk to a food safety expert. Critical Control Points and Critical Limits are key components of a robust Food Safety Management System, accounting for 33% of your overall score in Scores on the Doors.

Top Tip

Make sure you know the difference between a Critical Control Point and a Control Point.



Inspection point 7

Staff Training Records

Your EHO is going to want to see evidence that your staff have received the appropriate training to help keep food safe whilst they are working in your food business.

Again, do you keep written records? You need to and it will take you only a few minutes to keep records for this.

It's great that you know what to do and implement procedures and practices to keep safe food, but do your staff?

You will protect your business by making sure all staff are trained to a minimum of Food Handler Level 2.

If you think its okay that their training was done 5 years ago, think again. Food Handler training and certificates should be renewed every 3 years.

An Environmental Health Officer needs to see that your staff are trained. If you have been putting it off for ages, don't put it off any longer, it's just a matter of time before you get pulled up for it, when the EHO visits you.

Inspection point 8

Staff Personal Hygiene

If you don't get this right you've lost from the start.

How clean are you and your staff?
What bad habits do you and they have without even realising it?

Top Tip

Poor personal hygiene of staff working with food is one of the biggest causes of food poisoning.

This one alone will potentially have an EHO closing you down temporarily.

And it's so easy to get right.

Do they wear the correct clean clothing every day? If they don't, it will put your customers off eating with you anyway, regardless of whether they get ill.

Do they really know when and how to wash their hands? You may think its common sense – but we are AMAZED at how many people don't know when to wash them.

Train them... and keep a documented record of when they had the training.

If a customer does become ill you have shown due diligence by having your staff trained and that the training has been recorded. Your staff member is then liable, not you.

Inspection point 9

Food Safety Hazards

Have you thought about and looked into what hazards affect your food business?

We are talking about the 4 categories of hazard here, namely:

Physical – hair, cardboard, skin flakes etc

Chemical – Detergent, Disinfectant, Fly Spray etc

Bacterial – E-Coli, Salmonella, Listeria etc

Allergen – Tree nuts, Peanuts, Wheat etc

How can these impact in your business and what could you do to prevent them?

Something simple like allergens requires you to:

Communicate – with your customers

Clean – with a correct cleaning schedule in place

Avoid Cross-Contamination – use correct utensils and storage containers, and different surfaces to prep on, or correct cleaning down of a surface before reusing.



Your EHO will want to see evidence that you understand your business and what could go wrong. He or she also wants to see you know what to do if something goes wrong and how you could prevent it in the first place.

Top Tip

Excuse what may look like another gratuitous sell, but a robust documented Food Safety Management System incorporating HACCP principles will help you identify, understand and eliminate or minimise hazards within your business so they're no longer a threat.

Inspection point 10

So here's the last area your EHO is going to be looking at when deciding on your rating. Technically it's more of a commitment to action than an inspection point:

At the end of their visit you will have a review with your EHO. Also called a 'de-brief', this will be both verbal and written and is your chance to discuss any failure points and get advice on how to make quick simple improvements.

It's always a good idea to have your own 'Environmental Health Officer visit form' which you fill out together. Get them to sign it as well, demonstrating any improvements or actions both parties are agreeing to.

This demonstrates your commitment to a proactive approach to food safety, an approach likely to win you praise as taking responsibility and managing your own food safety is a key theme for all EHOs. It's almost certain to result in you being inspected less often as well.

Remember they do a difficult job and take a lot of flack, so anyone demonstrating a willingness to work openly, in partnership with their EHO is likely to stand out and be much encouraged and helped.

Top Tip

Whatever they have asked you to do, make sure you act on it straight away. If on their next visit they see no progress, they are not likely to be quite so helpful or accommodating.

This next tip may to some people be counter intuitive, but here it is; once you've acted on your EHOs recommendations, invite them round to look at your progress.

Use this meeting to demonstrate your commitment and to ask further advice. Doing this is likely to have a beneficial effect on your Scores on the Doors rating, plus by making an appointment, you'll actually know exactly when they're going to turn up!



Last words

We hope you have enjoyed this eBook and found it useful. Well done for getting to the end. Being better informed helps you run a better, safer and more profitable food business. And hopefully it's taken you less than 30 minutes to read it!

It's fair to say it's probably going to take you longer than 30 minutes to implement everything we've recommended. However, the possibilities of a better working relationship with your EHO, a better Scores on the Doors rating, protecting your business, and ultimately the production of safer food for your customers have to be worth the time invested.

Once you have food safety, your EHO and inspections taken care of, you can concentrate on why you got into the food business in the first place; creating great dishes with passion and flair, and giving your customers an outstanding experience.

All the above plus the good PR opportunities that 5 stars and Elite bring, ensures customers come back time after time.

Best wishes.

Nick and Marcus

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Pass it on

Feel free to share this resource with others who you feel would benefit from food business insider knowledge.

A Big Thank you

We would like to thank all that have helped **The Safer Food Group** to build our guides and help food businesses to help themselves.

The Scores on the Doors team at South Cambridgeshire Council

www.scoresonthedoors.org.uk

Plus all the 5 Star rated businesses within the South Cambs region

Another thanks to all our partners that work hard to promote and work in collaboration with us.

