

New 2009

AIB Food Safety Standards

Given the spate of bad publicity over the past 2 years regarding lapses in food safety standards around the world, AIB International, the inspection company of food and beverage plants in more than 80 countries including Singapore and Indonesia, had reason to globally benchmark themselves in the pursuit of continuous improvements and keep abreast of changes in the food regulations and industry as well as meeting stricter requirements from customers.

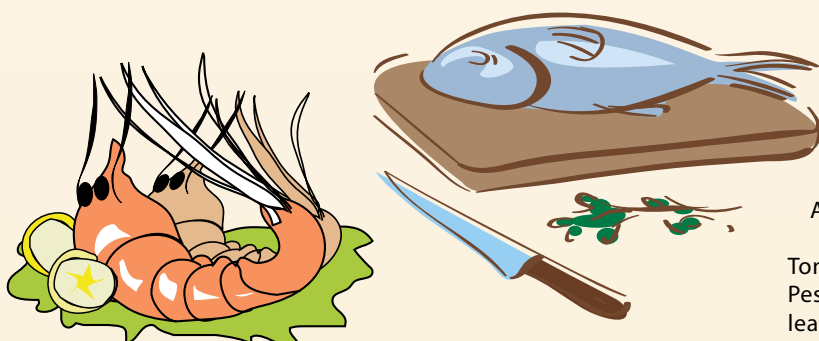
Even Singapore had a bad case of Salmonella poisoning involving a bakery chain end December 2007. Fortunately no one died although a few consumers became sick and were admitted to hospitals for treatment. The outbreak could have come from lack of proper hand washing or tainted cream used in the products or employees being carriers. A high level of Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) through proper hygiene practices, better food handling and health control procedures would have been able to prevent such an occurrence.

At about the same time, the most sensational in American history occurred involving salmonella poisoning caused by tainted peanut butter which killed 9 persons, resulting in several law suits. More than 600 people in 43 states, half of them children, were sickened.

The United States Food and Drug Administration Inspectors found cockroaches in the peanut plant in Georgia and mould on its ceilings and walls. Water leaked into the plant through open gaps in the roof. The roasting facility did not maintain the temperature required to kill the bacteria. There is now a call for prosecution for possible criminal violations.

Salmonella is a bacteria that can cause vomiting, abdominal cramps, diarrhoea, bloody stools and fever, usually lasting 4 to 7 days. It is most dangerous to infants, the elderly and people with impaired immune systems.

Salmonellosis (or acute food poisoning) is also associated with rodents and houseflies, whose presence in a food establishment is bad news.



The latest food recall in January 2009 in Singapore involved the canned broth of abalone concentrate imported from Thailand due to a foul odour. Investigation is still taking place to determine if the cause is spoiled ingredients, defective canning processing or something else.

Under the new 2009 AIB Food Safety Standards the emphasis is on "Integrated Pest Management" (IPM) rather than the outdated "Pest Control" and the score for this section forms as much as 20% of the entire system. It wants to see strategies drawn up jointly by the food establishment and their pest management contractor that prevent pests from ever having the opportunity to thrive in a food environment so that these pests do not adulterate food products. Proper documentation on records and procedures should be maintained on file for traceability purposes in line with the saying "the weakest ink is better than the strongest memory". The scoring system is based on the risk to food safety and how effective the IPM program is functioning.

Attention to detail, close relationship between the pest contractor and the food company as well as good operational, cleaning and maintenance practices would all help to control pests. As an example, when it comes to food safety, even a simple item like a measuring cup used in dispensing pesticide should be properly labelled to prevent any confusion and have it accidentally used for another purpose.

What all this means is that to pass a future AIB Audit with flying colours the pest management team has to provide professional service, be well trained in IPM and GMP, practise safe use of pesticides and be effective in managing the pest program together with the food establishment. All records should be complete and accurate with proper trend analysis conducted and supported by actions taken for improvements. Annual site assessments would help ensure the program is kept current.

All these changes were highlighted in a recent 3-day AIB Seminar conducted in Penang by AIB's Anthony Raschke, Jennifer Tan and Cheng Ai Ling. They also covered a wide range of topics involving integrated quality system, food defence, sanitation, inspections, design of equipment, allergens, HACCP, changes to the AIB standards and IPM.

Tony Tan, Tan Eng Kooi and Caroline Lim from Aardwolf Pestkare attended and are equipped to use what they have learnt to help clients pass their audits based on the revised standards.