

# Vacuum Packing

Good Hygiene Practice  
Guide No 15



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# Vacuum Packing

Good Hygiene Practice Guide No: 15



HACCP Chart Reference

Food Storage, Food Preparation, Vacuum Packing

## Legal Requirements

The Food Hygiene Regulations requires all food businesses to identify and prevent / eliminate hazards to acceptable limits. This includes the consideration of hazards associated with complex equipment such as vacuum packers, and any materials used for wrapping and packaging are not to be a source of contamination.

## Food Safety Hazards

There is a risk of cross-contamination from foodborne bacteria such as *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella*, *E. coli* O157 and other *E. coli* strains where the same piece of complex equipment, such as **vacuum packers, slicers, and mincers** are used to process raw and ready-to-eat foods.

Vacuum packing can also create conditions which may lead to the survival and growth of certain harmful bacteria such as *Clostridium botulinum* and *Listeria monocytogenes*. These bacteria can not only grow without air but at cold temperatures as low as 0°C and if allowed to reach certain levels can be fatal.

There have been many cases of food poisoning outbreaks which have been linked to the dual use of vacuum packers, some resulting in the loss of life.

Depending on the complexity of the equipment, the contamination may not be removed during routine cleaning and disinfection process and therefore can result in any ready-to-eat foods processed becoming contaminated. Cross-contamination is the most common cause of food poisoning therefore, these complex pieces of equipment cannot be dual used.

## Definitions

**Complex Equipment** - Items of equipment that can be very difficult to clean adequately between uses, as they are made up of hard to access parts or small parts. The surfaces may also not be smooth or hard to access.

**In-Direct Cross-Contamination** - The spread of harmful bacteria onto food from surfaces, hands or equipment that have been contaminated.

**Dual Use** - When equipment or utensils are used for both ready-to-eat and raw after being adequately washed.

**Ready-to-Eat** foods - Foodstuff or ingredients that are intended to be consumed without the need for further heat treatment or processing.

**Raw** foods - Any raw meat or food (including vegetables) that are a potential source of *E. coli* O157.

## Purpose of a Vacuum Packer

Vacuum packing is a method of packaging that removes air from the package prior to sealing. There are many benefits to vacuum packing foods such as providing secure packaging, reducing food spoilage, portion control, and improved product storage.

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## Safe & Hygienic Use of a Vacuum Packer

### Personal Hygiene

- Food handlers must ensure their hands and protective clothing are not vehicles for contamination when handling the packaging materials.
- Good personal hygiene is important at all times and hands should be washed before beginning to use the vacuum packing machines and if switching between raw and ready to eat.

### Storage & Separation

- Where permanent work areas for “raw” and “ready-to-eat” food preparation and handling have been designated, then the vacuum packers should be located in this suitable area depending on its use.
- Materials used for vacuum packaging should be stored in a clean and dry environment so that they are not exposed to a risk of contamination and stored within proximity to the relevant vacuum packer.
- Vacuum packing materials for raw foods should be stored separately and away from vacuum packaging materials for ready-to-eat foods.
- Food handlers should visually check the integrity and condition of the vacuum packaging material to ensure the packaging does not pose a risk of cross-contamination.

### Signage

- Vacuum packers must be clearly labelled “**Raw Use Only**” or “**Ready-to-Eat Use Only**”. All food handlers must be aware of the intended use for both.
- Vacuum packaging materials should be stored within proximity of the designated vacuum packer



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## Vacuum Packing Steps & Labelling

- The vacuum packer should be used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
- Ensure every vacuum-packed packet is suitably and sufficiently sealed with a tight fit round the food and the seal intact.
- Check packets for excess air and/or leaks to minimise the risk of contamination and subsequent growth of bacteria.
- Vacuum packed ready-to-eat high-risk food must be stored at a maximum of 5°C or below. As *Clostridium botulinum* and *Listeria monocytogenes* can grow at refrigeration temperatures you are strongly recommended to set the fridge temperature at 1-5°C or less to slow their growth.
- Date labelling (shelf-life) for in-unit made chilled foods must not exceed 7 days from the date and time of production (3 days in Republic of Ireland) and 6 months (3 in Republic of Ireland) for frozen in-unit made foods.
- Clear 'production and use by dates' should be put on all packets using the Compass date labels.
- It is essential that any out of date chilled vacuum-packed products are discarded, even if the food appears acceptable to the senses, e.g. sight, smell, because it could cause illness.

## Cleaning of Vacuum Packers

All equipment which comes into contact with food should be adequately cleaned and disinfected. Vacuum packers should be cleaned before and after use and be cleaned thoroughly weekly. All users of the vacuum packing machines should be trained in how to clean and disinfect the vacuum packer, using the specific cleaning schedule (appendix 1).

- Only those employees listed on the Authorised User List should be permitted to use and clean the vacuum packing machines.
- Vacuum packers should be cleaned before and after use.
- Close attention must be paid to the hidden areas and removable plates.
- Cleaning should be undertaken using the appropriate sanitiser, (e.g. Oasis Pro 20) ensuring the minimum contact time has been achieved.

COMPASS GROUP		COMPASS GROUP UK & IRELAND – VACUUM PACKER CLEANING SCHEDULE		SAFE FOOD
Unit Name:		Location:		
ITEM	PRODUCT	DOSAGE RATE	PPE REQUIRED	METHOD
Vacuum Packing Machine  <i>Must be cleaned prior to and after each use</i>	Oasis Pro 20	20 ml via dispenser per 600 ML trigger spray	Nitrile/Latex-free Gloves EN374 for prolonged use	<p><b>Interior</b></p> <p>Remove the insert plate. Remove any food debris. Thoroughly clean the lid, the silicon strip, the counter bar and interior base, sides and walls of the vacuum chamber with a clean damp cloth and Oasis Pro 20 solution.</p> <p>Spray all surfaces with Oasis Pro 20 sanitising solution and leave for one minute. Then rinse and wipe dry with paper towel.</p> <p>Thoroughly clean all surfaces of the insert plate with a clean damp cloth and Oasis Pro 20 solution.</p> <p>Spray insert plate surfaces with Oasis Pro 20 sanitising solution and leave for one minute. Then rinse and wipe dry with paper towel. Replace the insert plate in position.</p> <p><b>Exterior</b></p> <p>Thoroughly clean all of the exterior surfaces with a clean damp cloth and Oasis Pro 20 solution. Spray surfaces with Oasis Pro 20 sanitiser and leave for one minute. Then rinse and wipe dry with paper towel.</p>
<p><b>SAFETY PRECAUTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before cleaning electrical machinery ensure it is switched off and isolated from the mains.</li> <li>• Before cleaning gas appliances ensure they are turned off.</li> <li>• Take care when cleaning hot items.</li> <li>• Follow all safety precautions shown in COSHH Product Assessments for the cleaning product being used for each task.</li> </ul>				
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## Training of Vacuum Packer Operators

If a food handlers role includes the use of a vacuum packer then the employee must undertake training in the risks and cross-contamination hazards associated with vacuum packers and use of the vacuum packers before they commensurate this activity. This includes the Safety Conversation GHP 15 - Vacuum Packing and Safety Conversation GHP 4 - Cross Contamination.

Food handlers must be adequately supervised, trained and/or instructed to ensure movement between raw and ready-to-eat areas are managed in such a way that cross-contamination is minimised.

Venues should have an Authorised User List where only those on the list of all employees who have been trained on the use of the vacuum packer and understand the risks.

## Maintenance

- A full dismantle should only be undertaken by a competent engineer as the internal components need to be accessible, cleaned and disinfected.
- All vacuum packers must be serviced annually by appropriate and competent contractors. Records of the annual service and testing must be retained on file.
- Vacuum packers must be kept in a good state of repair, that allow them to be kept clean and protect food from contamination.
- Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) must be carried out regularly on smaller portable electrical equipment.
- Any damage or disrepair to the vacuum packers must be reported. The vacuum packer must be removed from use until the packer has been repaired, or clearly labelled "Do Not Use"
- Any defective structure, equipment or utensils should be recorded on the Compass Repair & Maintenance Record form, or client-based system if applicable, and reported to the correct maintenance provider accordingly.
- Unit or Compliance Managers should audit their catering premises and equipment on a 3-monthly basis and complete the HSE Quarterly Record accordingly.

COMPASS GROUP UK & IRELAND RECORD OF REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE						
Site Name: High St Bank Ltd				Unit Number: 01234		
Date	Nature of Fault/Problem	Reported By	Reported to	Date of Follow Up Call	Action taken	Date Completed
10/08/09	Dishwash room floor slippery	D Smith	High St Bank Helpdesk	3/09/09	High risk of slip accident	
13/08/09	Reduce the heating in the office	D Smith	High St Bank Helpdesk		Heater adjusted at control panel	13/08/09
10/09/09	Light not working in walk-in fridge	D Smith	High St Bank Helpdesk		Bulb replaced	11/09/09
10/09/09	Yellow marker in loading bay faded	D Smith	High St Bank Helpdesk	17/09/09	Yellow line repainted	18/09/09

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## Additional Guidance

1. Equipment Maintenance & Repair
  - Refer to **Good Hygiene Practice Guide No. 14 - Food Premises** for guidance regarding catering equipment service and maintenance.
2. Training
  - Refer to **Good Hygiene Practice Guide No. 1 - Food Hygiene Training** for guidance on adequate staff training for vacuum packer operators.
3. Cross-Contamination
  - Refer to **Good Hygiene Practice Guide No. 4 - Cross Contamination** for guidance on preventing cross-contamination.
4. Labelling and Shelf-life Controls
  - Refer to **Good Hygiene Practice Guide No. 5 - Food Labelling & Shelf-life** for guidance on how to label once you have vacuum packed foodstuff or ingredients.
5. Cleaning
  - Refer to **Good Hygiene Practice Guide No. 12 - Cleaning** for guidance on how to adequately clean the vacuum packer.



COMPASS GROUP UK & IRELAND – VACUUM PACKER CLEANING SCHEDULE



Unit Name:

Location:

ITEM	PRODUCT	DOSAGE RATE	PPE REQUIRED	METHOD
<p>Vacuum Packing Machine</p> <p><i>Must be cleaned prior to and after each use</i></p>	<p>Oasis Pro 20</p>	<p>20 ml via dispenser per 600 ML trigger spray</p>	<p>Nitrile/Latex-free Gloves EN374 for prolonged use</p>	<p><u>Interior</u></p> <p>Remove the insert plate. Remove any food debris. Thoroughly clean the lid, the silicon strip, the counter bar and interior base, sides and walls of the vacuum chamber with a clean damp cloth and Oasis Pro 20 solution.</p> <p>Spray all surfaces with Oasis Pro 20 sanitising solution and leave for one minute. Then rinse and wipe dry with paper towel.</p> <p>Thoroughly clean all surfaces of the insert plate with a clean damp cloth and Oasis Pro 20 solution.</p> <p>Spray insert plate surfaces with Oasis Pro 20 sanitising solution and leave for one minute. Then rinse and wipe dry with paper towel. Replace the insert plate in position.</p> <p><u>Exterior</u></p> <p>Thoroughly clean all of the exterior surfaces with a clean damp cloth and Oasis Pro 20 solution. Spray surfaces with Oasis Pro 20 sanitiser and leave for one minute. Then rinse and wipe dry with paper towel.</p>

**SAFETY PRECAUTIONS**

- Before cleaning electrical machinery ensure it is switched off and isolated from the mains.
- Before cleaning gas appliances ensure they are turned off.
- Take care when cleaning hot items.
- Follow all safety precautions shown in COSHH Product Assessments for the cleaning product being used for each task.

