

# Supporting the latest food safety initiative in Dubai

by **Richard Sprenger, Chairman, Highfield Awarding Body for Compliance.**

Dubai is one of the world's leading tourist destinations and has more five star hotels per square kilometre than anywhere else in the world.

Food safety is the responsibility of the Dubai Municipality Food Control Department (the Department) which is committed to ensuring the highest standards of hygiene, especially in the higher risk food premises.

In June 2009 two young children died from food poisoning, allegedly as a result of eating takeaway food from a Dubai restaurant. This was the catalyst for Dubai Municipality to secure additional improvements in food safety. Four and five star hotels are already legally required to have a food safety management system in place, train staff and maintain the premises and equipment to the highest standards.

Furthermore, many of the hotels employ well qualified hygiene officers to provide advice, train staff and protect customers.

## Global research

The Department researched globally to find food safety initiatives that had improved standards and reduced the risk of food poisoning. One such initiative has been implemented in Australia where every licensable food business in Queensland is required to have a food safety supervisor.

In Florida, USA, it is the responsibility of the certified manager to inform all employees under their supervision and control who engage in the storage, preparation, or serving of food to do so in accordance with acceptable sanitary practices. Furthermore, all food establishments must have a certified manager or managers responsible for all periods of operation.

Bobby Krishna, the Senior Food Studies and Surveys Officer and Coordinator of the Dubai International Food Safety Conference recommended that Dubai Municipality should implement the 'Person in Charge Programme' (the PIC Programme). The Director of the Food Control Department, Khalid Mohammed Sharif Al Awadhi, who is



**Khalid Mohammed Sharif Al Awadhi and Richard Sprenger in Dubai.**

committed to maintaining Dubai as a leader in food safety, also gave his full support to the programme. He believes that the Person in Charge concept will assist food establishments in Dubai maintain world class standards.

Bobby Krishna contacted several food safety experts to seek their views on the most effective way of implementing the PIC Programme, including some of the world's leading food safety experts, Dr Peter Snyder, Dr Ben Shepherd in America and Professor Chris Griffith, now in South Africa. Highfield were also approached by the Department to provide advice on training and qualifications. It was considered important to link the Person in Charge Certification to an internationally recognised qualification.

The programme became mandatory in January 2011 and all premises must comply by the end of the year. New premises will not be licensed unless they have the required number of PICs in place.

A Person in Charge (PIC) is required for all types of food businesses. The PIC is

required to be present throughout the whole operation of the business and is accountable to the owner and the government for making sure all food handlers follow satisfactory policies and procedures relating to food safety. This means that most businesses will require more than one PIC and in the case of large businesses such as hotels, it is likely they will need at least two PICs for every restaurant.

A PIC can be the owner, a manager or a supervisor, but they must have direct authority, control and supervision of the food handlers. Selecting the right managers/supervisors to be a PIC will be essential to the success of the programme. Food inspectors from Dubai Municipality will therefore assist owners in determining the most appropriate candidates.

The level of training and qualification of the PIC depends on the risk associated with the business. So PICs in large, high risk businesses will need to successfully complete a three day course and examination, equivalent to UK's Ofqual accredited Level 3

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Award in food safety. Whereas the PICs in smaller premises and lower risk businesses will need to successfully complete a two day course and examination equivalent to the UK's Ofqual accredited Level 2 Award in food safety.

Currently Highfield Awarding Body for Compliance (HABC) is the only Awarding Body that is approved to offer the PIC Certification in Dubai. HABC will provide the PICs with an opportunity to obtain an internationally recognised UK qualification as well as the PIC certification. The final day of both courses is concerned with the Dubai rules and regulations, the role and responsibilities of the PIC and, in particular, the requirement for the PIC to undertake regular internal inspections and produce comprehensive reports. These reports will be closely examined by the Dubai food inspectors carrying out routine inspections or visiting as a result of a customer complaint.

In fact, the PIC will become the liaison officer for the food inspector as well as the person who the public can request to see in the event of a complaint or if they have an allergen problem.

## PIC course developed

Highfield was responsible for developing a suitable course for both the PICs and the PIC trainers. The first part of the courses is very much based on the UK Level 2 and Level 3 HABC Awards in food safety, modified to take into account the requirements of food safety in Dubai. One of the key features of the last day of the course is the 'desktop inspection' which consists of a series of photographs showing poor food safety practices. Candidates have to be able to identify the problem and advise on the immediate action that must be taken to remove the problem. They then recommend the action that must be taken to pre-

- Cross-contamination – prevention.
- Active managerial control.
- Time/temperature control of food.
- Cleaning and disinfection.
- Hygiene and health of food handlers.
- Emergencies (responding to complaints, illness, incidents etc).
- Sources (approved suppliers/sources of food).

### **Table 1. The seven principles of responsibility.**

vent the recurrence of the hygiene non-compliance in the future. Unlike the UK, the examination cannot be invigilated by the trainer and the Awarding Bodies have been given this responsibility.

Highfield believed that the programme would have a greater chance of success if all the stakeholders were invited to contribute at the outset rather than Dubai Municipality imposing it without consultation.

Consequently, the pilot PIC Train the Trainer courses included managers from all sectors of the food industry, food inspectors and trainers. Several significant changes were made to the content as a result of this co-operation, including the decision to change terminology from American to European.

It is a requirement that PIC trainers are certified by approved Awarding Bodies and registered with the Department.

Additionally, they have to have a clear understanding of the PIC competencies, the knowledge and experience to explain the need for these competencies and the necessary training skills to deliver the training programme effectively. They will need a relevant degree or a UK Level 4 accredited food safety qualification and at least two years experience working in a food safety related job (this includes working in food service/catering at a managerial level or in a technical capacity).

PIC trainers must also successfully complete a two day Train the Trainer Course provided by an approved Awarding Body and Dubai Municipality. Training companies are approved for a period of three years.

Trainers will also need to undertake 30 hours of continuing professional development to maintain professional competence, enhance existing knowledge/skills and develop new knowledge and skills.

At the present time Highfield has been responsible for training over 100 PIC trainers and food inspectors, which is around 95% of all people that have been trained in Dubai to date. After successfully completing the PIC course and examination, the PIC is certified for a period of five years. A certified refresher training course must be completed before the end of the third year.

It is intended to provide training programmes and examinations in several languages for the Level 2 training, including Arabic, Malayalam, Bengali and Urdu. The Level 3 PIC courses will be conducted primarily in English, although an Arabic examination paper will also be provided.

Should the PIC leave a food business, the business must obtain a replacement PIC within 30 days and enrol them on the PIC training programme within 15 days.

PIC Awarding Bodies have to be approved by Dubai Municipality and accredited by the Dubai Accreditation Department in accordance with ISO 17024.

Awarding Bodies are responsible for ensuring the effectiveness of the programme, including the auditing of 5% of training sessions provided by each trainer. They are also responsible for monitoring the CPD of trainers.

Audit information will generate a grading scale for trainers which will be displayed on the Dubai Municipality website. Another key feature of the PIC Programme is that it will be subject to independent evaluation by PhD students from North Carolina University under the close supervision of Dr Ben Shepherd.

### **Effective food safety training is making a significant contribution in Dubai.**



## Food safety culture

The food safety industry is looking very closely at the importance of having an all pervasive food safety culture in food businesses from the top downward. The challenge is how to establish and maintain that culture.

Highfield believe that this programme will make a significant contribution to creating such a culture in the food businesses of Dubai.

Such an innovatory and comprehensive food safety programme is an exciting challenge. By ensuring that managers are accountable for the standard of their business and the safety and quality of the food they sell there is every likelihood that the scheme will fulfill its purpose to improve food safety. ■

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