

What's new for Issue 6 of the Global Standard in Food Safety?

by **Jessica Robinson, technical director, NB Certification, UK.**

The sixth issue of the Global Standard in Food Safety has now been published by the BRC, and will be used for all audits undertaken from 1st January 2012.

The sixth issue of the Standard has been developed with the advice and input from working groups around the world. Extensive consultation with the users of the Standard was completed to understand the strengths and potential areas of improvement.

Areas for improvement

The feedback from Issue 5 was generally very positive – however the review process identified the following improvement areas which needed to be addressed in the new issue:

- Ensure greater balance of auditing time between the factory environment and paperwork review – with more emphasis on good manufacturing practice needed.
- Ensure consistency of audit results, so that grades awarded are truly representative of the standards sites can maintain on an ongoing basis.
- Provide a path to allow recognition of sites which are still developing their food safety systems.
- Reduce the need for multiple customer and other audits.
- Ensure that audit report is focused and provides value and does not just add cost.

Having reviewed the feedback, the Standard was re-developed by two multi-stakeholder working groups.

The draft Standard was tested in a series of trial audits – and following a extensive consultation process, the final publication was produced. The document is now readily available and sites have a transition period until 1st January 2012 to ensure the requirements are fully implemented.

One of the biggest changes manufacturers and users of the standard will notice is the wording and layout of the standard. The emphasis has been on simplifying wording and the

removal of ambiguity. Users of the Standard will notice some clauses have merged (with an overall reduction by 25%). Other clauses have expanded – most noticeably clauses relating to supplier management, foreign body control and allergen management.

The review process has been used as an opportunity to look at clauses in the Standard, and to simplify and remove ambiguity. The full changes can be seen within the standard.

The biggest change to Issue 6 is the increased focus on Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs).

To assist this process, the 'Requirements' section of Issue 6 has been colour coded, highlighting the clauses which would normally be expected to be audited in the factory.

Issue 6 has also seen a change in the voluntary unannounced programmes. The use of the unannounced audits by sites is becoming increasingly common and the review process needed to ensure that some of the challenges associated with unannounced audits were removed (practical difficulties such as no key or no senior management present for the audit).

The working group for Issue 6 have addressed the practical difficulties by developing two options for the unannounced audits. Within the new Standard, Option 1 will be a full, unannounced audit (similar to that currently offered by Issue 5) and Option 2, a two part audit, where part one is completed on an unannounced basis (and addresses factory operations, and part two will be a planned audit based on documented systems).

The unannounced option provides sites with the opportunity to demonstrate the maturity of their quality systems – with successful sites being awarded a grade A+, B+ or C+. Although the unannounced option is voluntary, the BRC will help market the sites achieving the schemes top A+ Grade therefore creating marketing benefits for the sites certified under this scheme.

Issue 6 also sees the launch of the new Enrolment program. The working group have recognised that there

are sites which are currently developing their food safety systems. The Enrolment program aims to recognise these businesses and encourage these sites to ultimately achieve certification. Under the new scheme, sites are allowed to register their audit on the BRC Directory, which ultimately allows the recognition of improvements in food safety by providing a scored audit.

The audit report and scorecard will be available on the private area of the BRC Directory only. It should be noted that only sites achieving full certification will be issued a certificate and grade – sites not reaching this standard though the Enrolment Program will be issued an audit score.

Audits completed against Issue 6, will see transparency with regards to audit scope. Issue 6 sees the removal of factored goods from the scope (products purchased for resale), which means the audit report and certificate will only cover products manufactured at the site. In line with greater transparency, there is now a greater emphasis on what exclusions are permitted from scope.

Sites should be aware when applying for exclusions that they will only be accepted by the Certification Body where the excluded products can be clearly differentiated from the products within scope and make up a minority of the products at the site.

Other changes

Some of the other main changes seen in Issue 6 include; rewording of the 'Statement of Intent' and introduction of colour coding of requirements. Users of Issue 6 should note that certain requirements have been designated as 'fundamental' requirements.

Fundamental requirements relate to systems that are crucial to the establishment and operation of an effective food quality and safety operation. Failure to comply with the statement of intent of a fundamental clause (a major non conformance) will lead to non certification

at an initial audit or withdrawal of certification at subsequent audits. Sites will require a full re-audit to demonstrate evidence of compliance.

Colour coding of requirements is another change for Issue 6. The new standard provides sites a choice of audit protocols (announced and unannounced). The audit requirements within the new Standard have now been colour coded to provide a guide as to which requirements would be expected to be covered in part 1 and part 2 audits where the unannounced option is selected.

The new colour coding also provides an indication to auditors and sites which sections will be audited either in the factory or in a document review environment.

Risk zones

The launch of Issue 6 also sees clear guidelines on defining production risk zones. The Standard identifies four different risk zones within the processing and storage facilities, with corresponding levels of hygiene requirements and segregation to reduce the potential for product contamination. A decision tree is detailed at the back of the Standard for sites to determine which risk zone they fall into.

Certification bodies and manufacturers will notice that the certification process within Issue 6 has been strengthened. Sites will be required to provide the certification body with evidence to demonstrate that each non-conformance has been corrected. Furthermore, they will need to supply a full action plan to illustrate the root cause and preventative action.

In summary, the sixth issue of the Global Standard in Food Safety places focus on improving consistency of the audit process and provides its users more choice in audit options which allows sites to differentiate themselves.

The overall objective of Issue 6 has been to direct focus of the audit towards the implementation of GMP within production areas. ■

✉ jessica.robinson@nbcert.com