



**Global Standard
FOOD SAFETY
ISSUE 9**

**UNDERSTANDING
PRODUCTION RISK ZONES**

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1 Introduction

This guideline is intended to help sites understand whether the products they produce will require handling in a high-risk, high-care or ambient high-care area, and how the specific clauses for these areas should be interpreted. It does not represent an extension of the Global Standard Food Safety Issue 9 (hereafter referred to as the Standard), new or additional clauses, but is a further explanation of the requirements. It also give examples, showing how the requirements of the Standard could be implemented.

Global Standard Food Safety first collated all the requirements for high-risk, high-care and ambient high-care products into a single section (section 8) in Issue 8. This guideline aims to provide greater clarity on the requirements for products that need to be handled in these areas.

One of the key tasks of any food processor is to ensure that the food safety controls operated within factory areas are appropriate to the products being produced. Therefore, where a site handles product susceptible to pathogen contamination, it is vital to understand the risks and implement effective controls that minimise this potential contamination.

The site therefore needs to consider:

- the pathogens to which its products may be susceptible
- the nature of these pathogens, including the likelihood of their survival and/or growth in the product
- the specific controls used to manage these pathogens, and how these controls are validated, monitored and consistently maintained.

For example:

'*L. monocytogenes* is hardy; it is salt-tolerant and not only can survive in temperatures below 1°C, but also grow in these conditions, unlike many other pathogens. It is also notable for its persistence in food-manufacturing environments. The bacterium is ubiquitous in the environment and can be found in moist environments, soil, and decaying vegetation.' Food and Drug Administration. *Bad Bug Book, Foodborne Pathogenic Microorganisms and Natural Toxins* (Second Edition) [*Listeria monocytogenes*, p.99]. 2012.

The expectations for factory hygiene, finish of buildings, equipment, protective clothing and staff hygiene should reflect the potential risks to the product and obviously the higher the risk associated with a particular product, the greater the controls required.

Within the Standard, particular attention is focused on products that are chilled or frozen ready-to-eat foods, and a small group of ambient, ready-to-eat products, all of which have been associated with food poisoning incidents. One of the primary techniques used by the Standard is to identify factory areas with different risks. This helps to ensure the appropriate food safety controls are in place and can:

- define the minimum hygiene and environmental standards to prevent pathogen contamination of these foods after the final process step
- identify restrictions to movement of personnel, materials or equipment between areas.

Within the Standard these areas are classed as high-risk, high-care and ambient high-care areas. Full definitions of 'high-risk', 'high-care' and 'ambient high-care' can be found within Appendix 2 of the Standard - a summary can be found in the Definitions section of this title. As an aid to understanding these definitions we include two decision trees in Appendix 1 of this guideline.

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