BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL
REGULATORY SERVICES

FOOD COMPLAINTS LEAFLET

Discovering a foreign object in food is a very unpleasant experience. However, not all pose a serious health risk. Here are some common food complaints together with a short explanation and suggestions for the best course of action.

If you would like further advice about the food you buy, please contact the Food Safety Team on 0121 303 4111. *We'll be happy to help!*

TINNED FOODS

Insects – occasionally, small grubs may be discovered in canned vegetables expecially sweetcorn and tomatoes. The grubs are the larvae of a moth which live inside the sweetcorn kernal or tomato and are impossible to see before they are processed. Although it isn't pleasant to find a grub in your food, they are killed and sterilised by the canning process. As the use of pesticides decreases, these types of problem will increase.

Action: Contact the manufacturer
No Public Health Risk

Wasps and fruit flies – these are naturally associated with fruit and so often found in tins of fruit. They do not carry disease.

Action: Contact the manufacturer
No Public Health Risk

Struvite – some naturally occurring elements in fish may develop into hard crystals during the canning process. These crystals may be mistaken for glass fragments and are called Struvite. They are not harmful and will be broken down by stomach acid if swallowed. Struvite is especially common in tinned salmon and will dissolve if placed in vinegar and gently heated for upto 15-20 minutes (they may not dissolve completely in this time but will reduce in size). Glass will not dissolve.

Action: Heat gently in vinegar for 15-20 minutes, if struvite contact the manufacturer, if glass contact the Food Safety Team.
No Public Health Risk if struvite, Public Health Risk if glass

Mould – dented, damaged or incorrectly processed tins may allow mould growth to occur. This could indicate an error in production or storage.

Action: Contact Food Safety Team
Possible Public Health Risk

FISH

Codworm – white fish such as cod or haddock may be infested with a small, round brownish/yellow worm found in the flesh. They are killed by cooking and are harmless to humans. The affected parts of the fish are usually cut away, but some may be missed.

Action: Contact retailer or supplier
No Public Health Risk

MEAT AND POULTRY

Skin, bone etc – products made from meat and/or poultry may contain small bones, skin or parts of blood vessels. These are unsightly but rarely a health hazard as they are normal parts of the original animal. They may sometimes cause problems such as a chipped tooth and these are best dealt with by the individual – via the Civil Court if necessary.

Action: Contact retailer/manufacturer
No Public Health Risk

Note: It is very rare for prohibited parts of an animal eg. genitals, eyes, eye-lids etc OR non-food animals eg. cats and dogs to be used for human food. Meat such as chicken or lamb is easily available and relatively inexpensive so that the use of prohibited parts or species is not economic.

FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

Stones, soil and slugs – fruit and vegetables commonly have soil, stones or small slugs adhering to them. This is quite normal as they originate from soil.

Action: Wash all fruit and vegetables thoroughly before eating
No Public Health Risk

Greenfly - Salad vegetables, especially lettuce may have greenfly attached. This is becoming more common as the use of pesticides decreases, but they are not harmful.

Action: Wash all salad items thoroughly
No Public Health Risk

Note: Mould growth will naturally occur when fruit and vegetables become bruised or damaged. This will be minimised if the buyer checks the produce before purchase and handles it carefully afterwards.

BAKERY GOODS

Bakery Char – Bread and cakes may contain bits of overcooked dough which has flaked off bakery tins. It does not necessarily indicate poor hygiene although they

may be mistaken for rodent droppings which are black and regular torpedo shaped, whilst bakery char is greyish and uneven in shape.

Action: Contact manufacturer or if in doubt, the Food Safety Team
No Public Health Risk

Carbonised Grease – The machinery used to produce bread and cakes is lubricated with a non-toxic vegetable oil. Occasionally, some of this may become incorporated into the dough giving the product a grey/greasy appearance.

Action: Contact manufacturer
No Public Health Risk

DRIED FOODS

Insects – Dried products such as flour, sugar and pulses may contain small insects such as psocids (book lice). These do not carry disease, but they are unsightly and can eat through the paper of the packet. They breed very quickly in warm, humid conditions and so spread into uncontaminated food very quickly.

Action: Throw away all affected food, clean cupboards with bleach solution (follow advice on bottle) and dry thoroughly. Store new dried foods in airtight containers. Ensure good ventilation in kitchen/ store cupboards and if you wish contact the Food Safety Team for advice.
No Public Health Risk

CHOCOLATE/ CONFECTIONERY

Bloom – chocolate may develop a light coloured bloom if stored at too high a temperature. It is not mould but is due to fat separation and is not harmful.

Action: Return to retailer
No Public Health Risk

Sugar Crystals – large sugar crystals may form in confectionery and may be mistaken for glass. The crystals will dissolve in warm water.

Action: Test with warm water, contact Food Safety Team if crystals do not dissolve
No Public Health Risk if sugar crystals, Public Health Risk if glass

Please note that when Regulatory Services investigate food complaints, we cannot get involved with compensation issues.