

REGION OF OTTAWA-CARLETON  
RÉGION D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT  
RAPPORT

Our File/N/Réf. Your File/V/Réf.	RC
DATE	25 July 2000
TO/DEST.	Coordinator Community Services Committee
FROM/EXP.	Associate Medical Officer of Health
SUBJECT/OBJET	<b>RESPONSE TO INQUIRY 26(99) REQUIREMENTS FOR THE HANDLING OF BULK FOOD PRODUCTS</b>

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## RECOMMENDATION

**That Community Services Committee and Council receive this report for information.**

## INTRODUCTION

The intent of this report is to provide information on the requirements for protecting bulk food products on display for self service by the public in food premises providing bulk food sales within the Region of Ottawa-Carleton.

## BACKGROUND

Retail food premises selling bulk food for customer self service range from smaller retail outlets with a major focus on bulk food sales to larger grocery stores which offer a small select amount of bulk food sales within a limited area of the greater facility. Food products available for self service in these premises vary from a confined selection of baked goods to, as is the case with dedicated bulk food stores, a full line of foods including but not limited to baking ingredients, spices, grain products, baked goods and candies.

Bulk food was very popular in the early to mid 1980s with the larger grocery chains in Ottawa Carleton and elsewhere devoting significant portions of their merchandising space to bulk food with customer self service as a feature. At that time, considerable effort was expended by the Health Department clarifying the requirements under which these products could be sold while maintaining compliance with the Food

Premises Regulations. While the regulations do not specifically deal with bulk food as a distinct issue, there remain some basic principles that affect the manner in which they can be offered for sale, whether on a limited scale as part of a larger food merchandising strategy or in a premises dealing exclusively in bulk food sales.

Firstly, bulk food products are limited to non-hazardous foods. This means that only foods that have not demonstrated the ability to support the growth of micro-organisms, which could cause food borne illness, can be offered for bulk self service. There is obviously less control of hygiene levels with the public at large compared to food handlers employed at a food premises. There have been no outbreaks of food borne illness in the Region of Ottawa Carleton where a bulk food item has been implicated.

While there is no specific requirement for the public to wear disposable gloves while handling utensils in selecting bulk foods, operators are encouraged to provide convenient supplies of gloves and encourage their use. Many stores voluntarily supply and encourage the use of disposable gloves.

Secondly, Ontario Regulation 562 addresses the principle of protecting bulk food supplies on display as amended to Ontario Regulation 586/99 in section 26. This section requires that all food shall be protected from contamination and adulteration. The evolving influence of this section with regards to bulk foods has resulted in features such as protective lids and covers on foods on display in containers of food grade material and the convenient continuous availability of various types of utensils such as tongs and scoops at the point of purchase to avoid the likelihood of direct contact with a food item. Operators are encouraged to maintain a high level of surveillance in bulk food areas to ensure that these utensils are continuously available and properly used.

Finally, the availability of containers and utensils which minimise the risk of consumer contact with bulk food can only be effective in preventing contamination if these items are cleaned regularly and effectively. Sections 71 through 81 of the regulations set the specific requirements for cleaning and sanitizing of these items and the equipment which must be available for this purpose. An evaluation of this process is an integral part of a routine inspection of any food premises.

## PUBLIC CONSULTATION

No public consultation was required for the preparation of this report.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications that will result from this report at this time.

## CONCLUSION

While there are no specific requirements for wearing gloves in places where bulk food is sold, many premises do provide them and encourage their use. The restrictions on what types of foods can be offered for self service by the public significantly reduces the risk of food borne illness. Additional requirements relating to protection of the food and cleaning of the various utensils and surfaces used in the storage and self service process further reduce the likelihood of contamination and subsequent food borne illness from this category of food product.

*Original signed by Dr. Edward Ellis*