



Product Testing

Frequently Asked Questions

January 2006

Food Product Testing

The Food Safety Act 1990 extends the definition of 'sale of food' to include the giving away of food for product testing. Therefore, researchers must comply with all food preparation and labelling requirements.

(Extract)

2.—(1) For the purposes of this Act—

(a) the supply of food, otherwise than on sale, in the course of a business; and

(b) any other thing which is done with respect to food and is specified in an order made by the Ministers,

shall be deemed to be a sale of the food, and references to purchasers and purchasing shall be construed accordingly.

The provision of an information sheet alone will not meet legal requirements. All products must have a label affixed to their packaging. An information sheet can only be used as an additional tool to gain the respondent's informed consent.

Ingredients

Q1 Our client has asked us to undertake a hall test to get respondents to taste several different types of chocolate biscuit without providing them with a list of ingredients. Is this acceptable?

A No, respondents must be provided with details of all of the ingredients contained within the biscuits being tested. The list of ingredients must be clearly visible on the packaging itself. In addition, you may also use an accompanying information sheet to hand to the respondent to read before tasting any of the chocolate biscuits. You do not need to highlight the proportion or amount of each ingredient, just provide a list of ingredients presented in descending order of weight.

Q2 Do I need to provide any other information in addition to the list of ingredients upon food and drink products being tested in a hall test situation?

A For food and drink products, it is also necessary to indicate any appropriate health matters or possible allergic reactions.

New rules establish a list of 12 food allergens, which will have to be indicated by reference to the source allergen whenever they, or ingredients made from them, are used at any level in pre-packed foods, including alcoholic drinks. The list consists of cereals containing gluten, crustaceans, eggs, fish, peanuts, nuts, soybeans, milk, celery, mustard, sesame, and sulphur dioxide at levels above 10mg/kg or 10 mg/litre expressed as SO₂. Please see the Eat Well website for further details:

<http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/foodlabels/labellingterms/allergenic/>

Handling Food

Q3 I am organising a hall test where respondents will be asked to taste a number of different cheese snack products. Are there any requirements for the handling of such food products?

A Full details of all of the requirements are contained within the Food Standards Agency's Safer Food document, available at <http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/hygiene/sfbb/>

In summary, food handlers must:

- Not be unwell, or have been unwell in the previous 48 hours
- Must wash their hands using soap and water and dry them before handling any food, after using the toilet and after handling rubbish
- Have their hair fastened back
- Not eat, chew gum or smoke in the room where the food is being stored, prepared or tested

Q4 If a food handler or interviewer who is handling food cuts themselves during the course of a hall test day, what should they do?

A They must tell the hall supervisor or other person in charge and ensure that the wound is totally covered up using a bright coloured (not flesh coloured) plaster. The hall supervisor will need to have a sufficient supply of these brightly coloured plasters at hand for the duration of the hall tests.

Q5 What other requirements are there of food handlers in a hall test situation?

A If a food handler or an interviewer who is handling food wishes to eat their lunch, have a snack, smoke or consume a drink during the course of the hall test day, they must retire to a different room or go elsewhere. These activities must not be carried out in the room(s) where food or drink is being prepared or served to respondents.

Q6 What requirements are there for food handlers or interviewers who are handling food with regard to what they have to wear?

A Food handlers and interviewers who handle food must wear clean clothing and have their hair tied back or in a net. Also, they must not wear watches or jewellery (except a wedding band). Watches and jewellery can collect and spread dirt and harmful bacteria, or fall into the food. It is advisable that all food handlers wear rubber gloves when in contact with any food products.

Q7 Are there any requirements when selecting a suitable hall or venue for the testing and tasting of food products?

A You will need to check the venues you propose to use before they are booked for a number of items. If food is being prepared and served, the venue must have a clean and suitable kitchen which adheres to all the required Health and Safety requirements and has the appropriate certification. Please see: <http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/hygiene/>

Q8 How can I tell if a venue is suitable for a hall test where I will be asking respondents to taste food? We will be required to mix and heat up several meat based ready-made meals to present to respondents for tasting.

A You will need to check that the venue has the required certification for the preparation of food and that there are clean and hygienic facilities in which to prepare, heat up and/or cook the product and serve the food. It is important that any meat based product is heated through and cooked thoroughly before being serving to a respondent. The largest piece of meat in curries, stews etc. should have a soft texture all the way through with no pink or red. With any meat product, we would advise using a kitchen thermometer to ensure the product is cooked-through.

Food is safe if it has reached a high enough temperature for a long enough time. Examples of safe time/temperature combinations include:

- 80°C for at least 6 seconds

- 75 °C for at least 30 seconds

Food which is being kept hot must remain above 63 °C. Further information can be found at <http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/hygiene/sfbb/>.

Q9 What happens if a respondent contacts us to claim that they have become ill as a result of trying a cake at one of our hall tests?

A Whenever respondents are being asked to taste a food or drink product, it is advisable to ask them to sign a carefully worded declaration to confirm that they are not allergic to any of the ingredients in that product they are about to test. They should also sign a declaration to say they are happy to take part in the test at their own risk. It is advisable that the researcher ensures the client company takes full responsibility for any upset or illness thought to be caused by the food or drink product tested (and that this fact is contained within a contractual agreement). Additionally, if this is a potential worry, it is advisable to take, label and freeze a sample of each “batch” of food product made and presented to the respondents. This may be a practice used by the client already, so you should confirm this with them.

Q10 Can alcoholic drinks be tested in any hall test environment?

A No, certain venues such as some church halls will prohibit the consumption of alcohol on their premises. Always check that the venue manager is fully aware of the type of product being tested and that you obtain full written permission from the testing of any alcoholic drinks.

Any respondent who is asked to taste an alcoholic drink in a hall test environment must be informed of the strength of the alcohol and how many units/part units they are being asked to consume as part of the test. You will also be required to remind them of the legal limit for driving and to be mindful of this if they are driving or operating machinery after the taste test. Additionally, the age of respondents should be confirmed by appropriate documentation.

Q11 My client has asked me to test out several different varieties of yoghurt among respondents in a hall test situation. They have further instructed me that the yoghurt must always be presented to the respondents in the same order. Is it good practice to present the products to the respondents in the same order?

A No, good research practice would be to rotate the order in which the products are presented (and tasted) to help minimise any order bias.

Q12 How can I be sure that a new variety of baked beans I have been asked to present to respondents in a hall test comply with industry standards?

A On commission, the researcher responsible for the study must check this point with the client or the client check this with the manufacturer. All of the ingredients and packaging must comply with all known industry standards. It is advisable that this is confirmed in writing by the client or manufacturer at the proposal stage and certainly before the hall tests take place. Any claims that may result can then be referred back to the client / manufacturer. It is also advisable that the researcher takes out a public indemnity insurance policy.

Q Our client is importing food products into the UK to be tested at a hall test we are setting up on their behalf. Are there any requirements for the importation of food products for the purpose of market testing?

A It is the responsibility of the manufacturer to ensure that all import regulations have been obeyed and that all of the ingredients are legal in the country into which they are being imported. It is good practice for the researcher to obtain full written confirmation from the manufacturer that this is the case. It is also a requirement that the products have been manufactured in a clean and hygienic environment and conform to all known food manufacture requirements.

Q I am testing out a new dairy product at several hall test venues across the country. Do I need to make any provision for temperature controlled storage?

A Yes, you will need to find out at what temperature the product has to be kept. It is important that the product is then transported and stored at the required temperature throughout and that you have an appropriate thermometer to monitor this temperature is maintained at regular intervals throughout the time you are in possession of the products. This means that you may have to hire appropriate refrigeration units/fridges/freezers, etc.

Chilled food must be kept at 8°C or below. To achieve this it is recommended that fridges and chilled display equipment should be set at 5°C or below.

Also, you will need to ensure that the product is transported to, from and between hall venues at the appropriate temperature and that the handling conforms to all known

industry standards. It is advisable to ensure that the product's transportation and storage prior to the hall test is considered very carefully and that appropriate logistical plans are made in advance for each stage of the process from receipt to disposal. In many cases it is best to ask the manufacturer to undertake any transportation to and from the halls as they will have experience in this area.

Q Are there any other hazards to consider when testing out food and drink products among respondents?

A The client or manufacturer will be aware of the obligations and regulations surrounding the products being tested. This should be discussed with the client/ manufacturer in advance and be placed in writing. It is also essential that the researcher ensures that all relevant hygiene regulations are being fulfilled while you are in possession of the products.

Q Our client does not want us to display the brand name of the food product we are testing (in a series of planned hall tests). Is this acceptable?

A Yes, provided that the name of the food type is provided. Also, you must provide a list of ingredients and comply to any other labelling regulations that are currently in existence. It is important that the following information is clearly shown on the label of each product being tested (and on an accompanying information sheet, if used):

- Name and form of the food product
- List of ingredients (in descending order of weight)
- Place of origin
- Appropriate durability / storage/ usage conditions
- Instructions for use (if appropriate)
- Whether the product contains genetically modified materials
- Name and address of the manufacturer
- Flavouring and additives
- Compound ingredients added

- Potential allergic reactions
- Use by date

Q My client has asked me to test out a sugary confectionary product among children aged 5 – 14 years of age in a hall test situation. Are there any additional requirements?

A Firstly, you will need to obtain the consent of the parent or responsible adult before you approach the child. Also, the parent or responsible adult must be provided with an outline of the product being tested and be given the following information:

- Name and form of the food product
- List of ingredients (in descending order of weight)
- Place of origin
- Appropriate durability / storage/ usage conditions
- Instructions for use
- Whether the product contains genetically modified materials
- Name and address of the manufacturer
- Flavouring and additives
- Compound ingredients added
- Potential allergic reactions
- Use by date

Once permission has been obtained from the parent or responsible adult, the child must also be happy to be interviewed and also to try the product being tested.

Q The confectionary product I am testing in my forthcoming round of hall tests contains nuts. I am aware that some people have nut allergies and was wondering what is the best way of dealing with this?

A The best way of ensuring respondents with specific allergies are excluded is to administer an initial screening questionnaire which incorporates a show card / read-out to inform potential respondents of the product being tested and the ingredients and, at this early stage, to filter out those with such allergies.

Q Can we video record the tasting of products in a hall test environment for use in our final presentation of the results to our client?

A You must ensure that Respondents on attendance at a venue are informed about the nature of any observation, monitoring or recording, how the data will be used and Respondents are given the option of withdrawing from the hall test.

Q Our client wants to attend some of the hall tests we have set up on their behalf to see at first hand, the reaction to a new breakfast cereal. They have asked if they can listen into some of the interviews. Are they able to do so?

A You may allow your client to attend the hall tests and listen in provided that they are unobtrusive and do not comment any part of the interview. You must make clear to Respondents the capacity in which observers are present; Clients must be presented as such, even if they are also Researchers.

Q My client has asked me to test out a medicine in the form of cough drops in a hall test situation. Do I need a doctor to be present on-site?

A Is it strongly advisable to have a doctor available on-site at all such hall tests. The doctor should be provided with full details of the product being tested and the ingredients in advance of the hall test and given the opportunity to ask questions of the manufacturer prior to attending any of the halls.

Q Our client wishes to call the product to be tested by another well-known brand name (when the product is in fact another brand). Is this acceptable?

A *This approach is problematic for a number of reasons. Researchers have a responsibility to not mislead respondents (B17 of the MRS Code of Conduct) and as such respondents need to be informed fully about the project. To give them a different product than the packaging suggest has a number of dangers. The respondent may be allergic to the competitor brand or have religious beliefs which would not allow the consumption of the product due to the ingredients. The respondent may also have ethical and/or religious objections to the competitor brand (in terms of their corporate reputation etc.). As such A10 of the Code is also relevant (respondents must not be harmed as a result of participation in a research project). The overarching Code*

clause, A9, is also relevant. This states that researchers must not knowingly or negligently act in a way which could bring discredit on market research.

Q If I have any leftover food on completion of the hall test day are there any requirements relating to the disposal of such foodstuffs?

A You need to ensure that you dispose of all food products in a responsible manner at periodic intervals throughout the hall test day and that all rubbish is disposed of securely and in a refuse sack or container deemed suitable for the product in question. Once placed in a refuse sack or container, it is important that they are kept separate from any food that is being tested.

Q I have been asked to present respondents in a hall test situation with a micro waved pre-prepared ready-meal. Are there any issues I need to consider?

A Firstly, you will need to ensure that you know the appropriate cooking time for the power of microwave you will be using. Also, you will need to check that the product is cooked all-through. To do this you may need to have a kitchen thermometer to test out the temperature at centre of each product being tested. Further information can be found at <http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/hygiene/sfbb/>.

Also, consider the temperature on serving and warn respondents that the food may be too hot for immediate consumption.

Q Are there any requirements regarding the cutlery and crockery used in a hall test situation?

A All crockery and cutlery must be washed and thoroughly dried before presenting to respondents in a hall test situation. Also, you will need to ensure that there are no cracks in the crockery. Where possible, it is advisable to use disposable plates and cutlery.

Q An interviewer turned up at a hall test where food was being tested with a bad cold – what should I have done?

A You should have ensured, in advance, that all interviewers were fully aware that they can only work on a hall test where food is being presented if they are fit and well, and have not been ill in the previous 48 hours. It is not appropriate to have an interviewer prepare, handle or present a food product if they are unwell or could pass on germs to others. If they turned up they should have been sent home.

Q Do I need to inform that local health and safety department that my company is testing out food at a hall test venue?

If you run a food business for 5 or more days in any 5 consecutive weeks, you must tell (or arrange for someone else to tell) the local authority about any premises you use for storing, selling, distributing or preparing food. Food premises includes restaurants, hotels, cafes, shops, supermarkets, staff canteens, kitchens in offices, warehouses, guest houses, delivery vehicles, buffet cars on trains, market and other stalls, hot dog and ice cream vans etc.

Anyone starting a new food business must register with the local authority at least 28 day before doing so.

The majority of premises will have to be registered. However, certain premises are exempt from registration e.g. some which are already registered for food law purposes, certain agricultural premises, motor cars, tents, marquees (but not stalls), some domestic premises and some village halls. You should contact your local authority's Health Safety and Licencing Department for full details of their requirements.

Q Our client has asked us to test out a new brand of ice cream and place cartons of the new product in a sample of homes for tasting and testing. How will interviewers go about placing such a product?

A Whilst the interviewer may be responsible for finding and initially recruiting the respondent, we advise that the product is dropped off by a suitable company that can undertake (professionally) the transportation of frozen products. Typically, the transportation is organised by the manufacturer. You will also need to ensure that you fall within the data protection rules for the handing over of respondent details (for the home delivery).

Non-Food product testing

Q A respondent claims that their dog died as a result of trying out a new dog food as part of one of our product tests. What action do I need to take?

A The liability lies with the manufacturer as they should have carried out all of the required tests on the dog food product before allowing it for release for product testing. For a product test such as this, it is important that the study executive ensures that your client or the manufacturer has carried out all of the industry required biological tests on the

products being tested in advance of any testing in the field. Also, your client or the manufacturer should have taken out the required indemnity insurance. It is also advisable to take out your own indemnity.

Q Two respondents who have tried out a new bath cleaner as part of our market test have complained that it has taken off the surface of their bath. What should I do?

A The manufacturer of the product should have carried out all of the required tests on the product beforehand to ensure that it was suitable for general household use. The products that you will be provided should conform to all known industry standards for this product category. You will need to refer the complaints directly to them but beforehand, gain the permission of the respondents to hand over their contact details for the purpose of this complaint. You will also need to keep involved with all stages of the complaint procedure and that all parties keep you informed. The manufacturer's own insurance policy should cover this. For your next such research project, it would be advisable to check that the client or manufacturer has suitable insurance in advance of the fieldwork.