

eGUIDE

August 2025

Catering: food & alcohol
sub section

Guidance for events in
UK venues

AEV

ASSOCIATION
OF EVENT
VENUES

Resource Background

What is the eGuide?

The eGuide brings together guidance for achieving common standards of health, safety and operational planning, management and on-site conduct for events at all participating AEV member venues. The scope and development of the eGuide follows extensive consultation with operations professionals within the exhibition and event industry to ensure an overall approach that remains broadly acceptable to the community. The status of the eGuide is like that of an Approved Code of Practice. It is an industry-specific guide developed by authorised professionals from the UK event venues. It incorporates health, safety and operational practices that represent compliance with Building Regulations and health and safety legislation.

Now recognised as the industry's best practice document, the eGuide is continually reviewed by working industry professionals who represent the best advice currently available, and who themselves must work within the guidelines in their own professional capacities. Senior representatives from ACC Liverpool, Alexandra Palace, Business Design Centre, Excel London, Farnborough International Exhibition and Conference Centre, Harrogate Convention Centre, Manchester Central, NEC, Olympia Events, QEII Centre, Coventry Building Society Arena, SEC, Silverstone, Telford International Centre, The Brighton Centre, The O2 and The Great Yorkshire Event Centre currently sit on the **eGuide working group**, meeting twice a year to steer the guidance thematically and address any complex or contentious topics. Several additional venues also participate in this process and are gradually moving towards formal adoption of the document themselves. Additionally, **the eGuide sub-committee** works all year round to maintain the detail of the document, ensure consistency and simplify rules and regulations to the greatest possible extent.

The current eGuide sub-committee comprises:

Tim Byrne – Excel London

Ian Tynan - Excel London

Peter Boniface – Excel London

Del Cuttlan – Farnborough International Exhibition Centre

Michelle Baldwin – NEC (chair and chair of the eGuide working group)

Rachel Maybury-Smith - NEC

Paul Brough - Olympia Events

Jill Wadge – SEC

John Crooks - SEC

Instructions from this group are subsequently collated and actioned in the document by Alden Arnold, Head of Commercial and Projects, Association of Event Venues.

By coming together, and proactively seeking to identify where working conditions and regulations are common (or, due to unique site circumstance, different), contributing venues are, in essence, providing the answers to questions that organisers and supplier companies may have resulting in more efficient on-site activity, a smoother operation for the event organiser, and, therefore, a more polished product for the client, exhibitor and visitor.

In competent hands these guidelines should be an invaluable tool, simplifying health & safety planning and management and other operational issues on the floor.

Application

For the purposes of this document the word 'event' will generally apply to any event held in the participating eGuide venues. It must be noted that in multipurpose venues where exhibitions, conferences and other like events can be run alongside sporting fixtures or musical entertainment in arenas, other guidance or legislation may be more applicable for specific activities.

How to Use and Engage with the eGuide

The eGuide will save hours of painstaking and detailed work for any AEV venue seeking to maintain regulations that are compliant with UK law. Notwithstanding a few points of detail, which can be separately annotated, any AEV member venue that hosts any degree of exhibition business activity should be able to adopt these guidelines wholesale. The guide equally provides the basis for organisers to plan the operational management of their event and for suppliers and clients/exhibitors to understand what is required of them.

It must be stressed, however, that this is a **guidance** document. If meticulously followed, it should ensure that users are compliant with current health and safety law. Nevertheless, the particulars of each exhibition (or similar event) should still be considered on an individual basis and venues, organisers, suppliers and clients/exhibitors must all remember that it is ultimately their responsibility to ensure that they address health & safety, and other operational issues properly, in compliance with the law.

It must also be stressed that all employers have a legal duty to employ staff that are competent to manage health & safety, and other operations that are relevant to their level and range of responsibilities. This guidance alone is not a substitute for proper training and experience.

The committee welcomes any constructive comment on these guidelines. If you feel you can contribute, please email eguide@aev.org.uk, and your point will be considered at the next committee meeting.

If you require additional health & safety support there are several specialist companies providing consultancy, training and floor management capabilities within ESSA and AEO Associate membership.

EIA note on legal compliance

The Association of Event Venues (AEV), Association of Event Organisers (AEO) and Event Services and Suppliers Association (ESSA) are managed by the Event Industry Alliance (EIA) secretariat. EIA advocates those members of all three associations work within or beyond the requirements of UK law. Where a British standard, Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance, approved code of practice, other central or local government guidance or examples of case law suggest that specific working methods or standards are needed to meet the requirements of UK law, the EIA advocates that members adopt these. In instances where groups of members wish to collaborate on finding alternative, but equally as safe, methods of work that they feel are more suited to the operational constraints of the event industry than those described elsewhere, the EIA will facilitate that collaboration and any benchmarking or hazard and operability study (HAZOP) activity that is required, advise members of their specific duties and liabilities and, where requested, publish their findings, typically within the eGuide. The EIA cannot and does not however officially advocate any

standard or working practice other than those produced by HSE, British Standards Institution (BSI) or other government agencies and offices, whether published within the eGuide or not, and reminds all organisations, members and non-members alike, that it is their individual responsibility to assess the risks of their work and to establish practices that comply with the law and that prevent work-related injury and ill-health.

Catering – Food & Beverage and Alcohol

Other relevant sections:

Gas

Sustainability

Waste and Cleaning

Water Features

Subsections:

- General Guidance
- Legal Compliance
- Hospitality Catering
- Sale of Food and Drink
- Food and Drink Product Sampling
- Alcohol
- Stand Planning for Food and Drink Exhibitors/External Caterers
- On-Site Management for Food and Drink Exhibitors/External Caterers
- Venue Specific Rules
 - Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre – Cookers and Ovens
 - The O2, ExCeL London and Olympia London – Deep Fat Frying
 - Coventry Building Society Arena and ExCeL London – General

General Guidance

- 1** The venue will provide all food and drink for your visitors and any hospitality you or your exhibitors may require.
- 2** Any alternative arrangements must be discussed with the venue at the earliest opportunity and approved by the venue in writing.
- 3** Where the provision of food and drink by other (external) caterers or exhibitors has been approved, full details of proposed preparation, cooking and dispensing arrangements must be submitted to the venue no later than 28 days prior to tenancy.

Legal Compliance

- 4** Organisers are wholly responsible for compliance with food safety and food information (including allergen) legislation by exhibitors and external caterers at their event.
- 5** Where there is a significant level of risk on any stands producing food for sampling and/or where there is (venue-approved) retailing of food for on-site consumption, organisers must contract the services of a 'commensurately trained' food safety consultant; the consultant will be vetted by the venue. Some venues may either nominate a consultant, or carry out the consulting role, at a cost to the organiser.
- 6** Your food safety consultant will be able to clarify your legal responsibilities.
- 7** Environmental health officers of local authorities work with venues and food safety consultants in monitoring and ensuring compliance with food safety and food information legislation, and they must be allowed access to any work areas, when requested.

Food Safety

8 Guidance on food safety and hygiene legislation can be found here: www.food.gov.uk/business-industry/caterers/food-hygiene and www.foodstandards.gov.scot

Food Labelling

9 The Food Information Regulations (FIR) also apply to all food and drink (including alcohol) sold, supplied or sampled at events: www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/packaging-and-labelling - (see also the links provided on this page to 'Labelling of pre-packed food' and 'Food labelling – non pre-packed foods').

10 The Calorie Labelling (Out of Home Sector) (England) Regulations may also apply.

Local Authority Registration

11 In the UK, any organisation carrying out a 'food operation' must be registered as a 'food business' with their local authority or provide evidence of exemption from registration. This must be completed no later than 28 days before the event, for food operations to take place. Exhibitors should check with their local authority if in doubt.

12 Food operations include the following activities:

- Selling food
- Cooking food
- Storing or handling food
- Preparing food
- Distributing food
- Sampling food

13 It may not be necessary for international exhibitors at trade events to register as a food business. Your food safety consultant can check this with the venue's local authority.

Sale and Supply of Alcohol

14 The organiser must apply for the venue's written approval for the sale and/or supply of alcohol and provide a floor plan of the event, with areas highlighted where alcohol is to be sold/supplied, no later than 28 days before the event.

15 In addition to The Food Information Regulations, the following legislation applies:

- [The Licensing Act \(2003\)](#), [The Licensing \(Scotland\) Act 2005](#) and subsequent legislation
- 'The Weights & Measures (Specified Quantities) (Unwrapped Bread & Intoxicating Liquor) Order'

16 Any sale or supply of alcohol, including sampling, is also subject to the venue's premises licence conditions.

17 Under the conditions of the venue's premises licence, the venue's Designated Premises Supervisor is the primary authority for licensable activities within the venue and may therefore approve or curtail any proposed sale or supply of alcohol.

18 Where alcohol is sold or supplied by anyone other than the venue's caterer, this must be carried out under the supervision of a Personal Licence Holder and a copy of the licence must be provided to the venue. The licence must be valid in the applicable jurisdiction, i.e. England and Wales; Scotland; Northern Ireland.

19 Exhibitors from outside the UK wishing to sell or supply alcohol within the venue are required to be authorised by a UK Personal Licence Holder, who is present on site at the event. The organiser can provide this authorisation, providing they assume full responsibility for the operations on the stand.

Hospitality Catering

20 The venue's hospitality catering partner holds exclusive rights to supply any food or drink, including alcohol, for hospitality on exhibition stands and in other areas associated with the event, unless specifically agreed otherwise by the venue in writing.

21 Where it has been agreed that an exhibitor may supply their own food and drink (see General Guidance above), they must comply with the above legislation and a corkage or concession fee may be applied.

Sale of Food and Drink

22 Any sale of food and drink by external caterers or exhibitors must be approved by the venue (see General Guidance above).

23 Food and drink (including alcohol) sold from stands must be sold in its original, sealed packaging and be for off-site consumption only; where appropriate, it should be sold in multi-packs.

Food and Drink Product Sampling

24 Exhibitors promoting an edible product at a food or drink event may offer samples of their product to visitors, providing that:

- any proposed sampling activity is notified in writing to the venue
- all samples are offered free of charge
- the product being sampled is a core part of their business

Food sampling

25 The acceptable sampling sizes for food are:

- singly served, bite-sized portions
- individually wrapped items (for off-site consumption only)

26 Should a sponsor or exhibitor wish to offer samples that are larger than the acceptable size, this must be agreed by the venue and a fee may be applied.

27 Sampling must be carried out safely and in such a way that the risk of cross-contamination is minimised. The following must be considered in a risk assessment:

- Where food is placed and how sampling is supervised
- How samples are offered, e.g. from a plate or bowl; samples must not be offered from the blades of knives
- Preventing 'double-dipping', where food items, such as breadsticks are used
- Preventing people from putting fingers into food
- Ensuring cutlery is used only once
- Cleaning of crockery before replenishing samples
- Where discarded items, such as stones or sampling sticks/utensils should be placed

Drink Sampling

28 The acceptable sampling sizes for drinks are as follows:

Soft and hot drinks	- 50ml
Beers/ciders or similar	- 50ml
Wine/fortified wines/Champagne/alcopops and similar	- 25ml
Spirits and similar	- 5ml

In Scotland, only one sample of any alcoholic drink is permitted per person.

29 Where hot drinks are sampled, the samples must be offered in double-walled cups and consumed within the exhibitor's stand; otherwise, cups must be fitted with close-fitting, secure lids.

Alcohol

Pre-Event

30 Any exhibitors approved to sell or supply alcohol (except that provided by the venue's caterers), whether for on-site or off-site consumption, must provide a copy of their Personal Licence.

Build-Up and Breakdown

31 The consumption of alcohol within the halls during build-up and breakdown is not permitted. Alcoholic drinks will not be available from the catering outlets within the halls during these times.

32 The venue may operate a drugs and alcohol monitoring service. Please discuss this with the venue.

Event Open Period

33 Where the venue has approved the sale and/or supply of alcohol from a temporary outlet managed by an external caterer, or from an exhibition stand, the following applies in addition to the guidance outlined under 'Legal Compliance' above and 'Risk Assessment' below:

- The Personal Licence Holder must be present on site (in some instances, a named, authorised representative may suffice)

- Alcohol can only be served during the hours stipulated in the venue's Premises Licence
- Products for retailing/sampling must be held in a secure area

Planning for Food and Drink Exhibitors/External Caterers

Risk Assessment

34 The key food-safety principles, known as Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP), must be followed. This includes carrying out and documenting a thorough food safety risk assessment (HACCP plan), outlining the critical control points of each activity taking place. This includes the sale or supply of alcohol.

35 The HACCP plan should consider the hazards and focus on measures critical in dealing with them.

36 The hazards associated with the storage, transportation, use, preparation, and sale of perishable goods are:

- Microbiological contamination
- Chemical contamination
- Physical contamination

37 HACCP-based procedures are only effective where good hygiene practices are in place.

38 Creating a HACCP plan:

Identify:

- any hazards that must be prevented, eliminated or reduced to acceptable levels
- the 'critical control points', i.e. the step or steps at which control is essential to prevent or eliminate a hazard or to reduce it to an acceptable level
- critical limits at critical control points

Establish:

- effective monitoring procedures at critical control points
- corrective actions when monitoring indicates that a critical control point is not under control
- procedures to verify that the corrective actions are working effectively
- records to demonstrate that the above measures are being followed
- procedures to be followed in the case of food poisoning/allergic reaction by consumers

Allergens and HACCP

39 A comprehensive assessment/allergen management plan (either separate or within the HACCP plan) must recognise the possibility of illness or even death caused by an allergic reaction.

The allergen management plan must include the following:

- Accurate and verifiable information, available for the consumer to review, listing the 14 named allergens
- Signage advising the consumer that this information is available

- Recognition that consumers may have intolerances to a wide range of food
- Effective segregation of foods containing allergens
- Procedures to be followed in the case of allergic reaction by consumers

40 For more information on HACCP visit www.food.gov.uk/business-industry/caterers/haccp

Kitchens/food preparation areas

41 Kitchens must comply with the stand fitting regulations and, where cooking is taking place, be enclosed with ½ hour fire-resisting construction.

42 All surfaces likely to be used during the event must be non-porous and easily cleaned. Suitable, non-slip floor covering must be provided on the service side of any counter and in kitchens. Carpeting is not suitable.

43 The kitchen/food preparation area must be large enough to meet potential demand and include adequate storage (refrigerated and ambient) and water and waste facilities.

Equipment

44 Equipment, including utensils and food containers must be kept clean, in a hygienic state of repair and be constructed of materials that are not absorbent and are easily cleaned.

Cookers, Ovens and Fat Fryers

45 Cookers, ranges, hobs, ovens and deep fat fryers must operate on mains gas or electricity. The use of bottled gas is not permitted. See Venue Specific Rules below.

46 Gas-fired cooking and heating appliances must be installed by Gas Safe registered fitters, in rooms or enclosures approved for the purpose and ventilated directly (where possible) to the open air.

47 Appliances must be sited well away from any combustible materials and mounted on suitable, non-combustible, heat-resistant bases.

48 Deep fat fryers must be located on stands so as not to endanger anyone in a gangway in case of flashover. They must be provided with thermostatic controls which will cut out at 200°C in accordance with BS EN 60335-2-37, IEC 60335-2-37 (Electric) and BS EN 203-1 (Gas), to prevent overheating of the oil and flashover. Appropriate fire-fighting equipment must be available on the stand, including enough wet chemical. See Venue Specific Rules below.

49 All fat fryers, including table-top fryers, must be installed and operated in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and guarded with suitable, protective shields.

Ventilation

50 Where cooking is likely to create a high concentration of smoke or airborne fats e.g. barbequing, grilling or frying, the activity will be subject to prior agreement by the venue and it may be necessary to ventilate the stand to the open air.

Food and Equipment Washing Facilities

51 It is the responsibility of each exhibitor/external caterer to assess the extent of their operation and ensure that adequate, suitable and sufficient washing facilities are provided.

52 The washing facilities required are determined by factors such as the food safety risks posed by the nature and scale of the operation and types of food, equipment and serving containers (disposable/reusable), etc.

53 Where the sharing of washing facilities is proposed, the organiser must ensure that the overall provision of facilities adequately services all exhibitors when operating at maximum capacity.

Hand-Washing Facilities

54 Where the risk assessment identifies that a hand-washing sink is required, a sink must be dedicated solely for hand washing and be easily accessible at all times.

55 If the risk assessment identifies that a dedicated, communal hand-washing facility is sufficient, the facility must be no further than 3 metres from any preparation area (in Scotland, hand-washing facilities must be within the preparation area).

56 It is recommended that facilities for hand washing, food washing and equipment washing (where required) are labelled with a suitable notice adjacent to each facility, to ensure that each one is used only for its intended purpose.

57 The following chart details the washing facilities required for each category of food operation (see also Venue Specific Rules at the end of this section):

Low Risk A) Serving pre-packed, ambient foods e.g. crisps, drinks, chocolate, snack bars, single-serving cakes, or; B) Serving products portioned and placed in individual containers off-site and not handled on site.	→	No Washing Facilities Required • Sanitising hand-wipes or anti-bacterial hand gel • Anti-bacterial cleaner and/or sanitiser
Medium Risk A) Serving pre-prepared and pre-packaged (sealed) foods requiring heating up e.g. pre-packaged sauces, soups, tinned ingredients etc. or; B) Serving "Ready to Eat" foods requiring handling/portioning on the stand including ice cream, cheese, ham and other cooked meats.	→	Washing Facilities • Hand-wash basin with an adequate supply of hot water, liquid soap, hand-drying facilities. (This should be set up before any food preparation begins.) • Disposable or sufficient quantities of utensils, if they are to be washed off site each day. • A dedicated wash-up sink if utensils are to be washed on site. • Anti-bacterial cleaner and/or sanitiser.
High Risk A) Cooking with raw ingredients or altering the food's properties with temperature e.g. rice, fish, eggs, meat (including burgers and sausages), poultry, plant-based foods, pulses and grains. B) Preparing/Serving high risk raw foods such as shellfish, Sushi and similar.	→	Washing Facilities • Hand-wash basin with an adequate supply of hot and cold water, liquid soap, hand-drying facilities. (This should be set up before any food preparation begins.) • Separate sink for equipment washing. • Separate sink for food washing/preparation. • Anti-bacterial cleaner and/or sanitiser.

58 The examples above are not exhaustive. If in doubt, your appointed food safety consultant will be able to advise on specific requirements, in accordance with food safety standards and legislation.

Waste Disposal

59 Refer to the venue for venue-specific waste management procedures.

60 Food waste must be separated from other waste. It must not be left on site and must be stored and disposed of in a hygienic way, in suitable, closed containers.

61 Liquids must not be poured away in toilets, wash basins or floor ducts.

62 Waste oils and fats are categorised as hazardous waste and must be disposed of in accordance with local authority guidelines. Each exhibitor/caterer is responsible for removing

its own waste oils and fats from the venue. Cleaning/disposal charges will be incurred if any such products are left on site. Further details can be found here:

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/food-and-cooking-oil-waste>

63 Guidance on reducing food waste can be found in the Sustainability section.

Food Hygiene and Safety Procedures

64 Your food safety consultant is responsible for advising you on how to fulfil food hygiene and safety requirements.

65 Hazards can arise whenever food is handled. Proper procedures must be in place to ensure that food is kept safe, and people's health is not compromised. This can be managed by:

Deliveries

- Checking deliveries for temperature, shelf-life and quality

Storage

- Providing racks for ambient storage, so that food is stored off the floor
- Keeping food covered
- Separating raw and ready-to-eat foods
- Storing only food in a food-storage area
- Maintaining storage at the appropriate temperature (see below)

Preparation

- Ensuring that cross-contamination between raw and ready-to-eat food is prevented

Wrapping and Packaging

- Ensuring that wrapping and packaging is undamaged

Temperature Control

- Holding hot food at a minimum of 63 degrees (Celsius)
- Holding hot food at below 63 degrees (Celsius), for a single period of not more than two hours
- After this period of time, discarding, chilling (to 8 degrees or less) or reheating (to at least 63 degrees/82 degrees in Scotland) and re-holding the food
- Storing cold food out of temperature control, or in the event of a refrigerator breakdown, for one period of up to a maximum of 4 hours and discarding the food after this time

Food Handlers' Fitness to Work

- Refer to the Food Standards Agency's 'Food Handlers: Fitness to Work – regulatory guidance and best practice advice for Food Business Operators'.

Supervision and Training

66 All staff engaged in food handling must be commensurately trained according to their duties and supervised to ensure they work hygienically. Evidence of training may be required for inspection on site.

On-Site Management for Food and Drink Exhibitors/External Caterers

67 Your food safety consultant will advise you on how to implement your HACCP plan on site.

Food Hygiene and Safety

Delivery

- Verify the temperature of the goods on receipt
- Move temperature-controlled products to the appropriate on-site storage immediately

Storage

- Verify that the planned arrangements for storage are being followed

Preparation

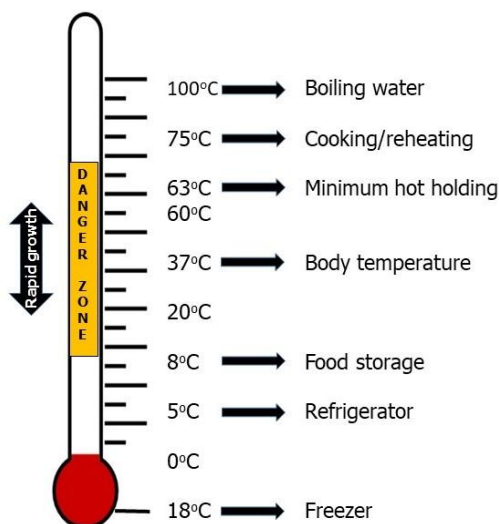
- Verify that the planned arrangements for preparation are being followed
- Ensure that food preparation and dispensing areas are always maintained in a clean condition and a hygienic state of repair
- Ensure that areas are well lit, free from rubbish and ventilated

Display

- Verify that allergen information is in place and signposted

Temperature Control

- Verify that the planned arrangements for temperature control are being followed
- Record temperatures to demonstrate due diligence
- Take core temperatures with a disinfected probe thermometer every 2-3 hours
- Discard hot food after 2 hours if it has been kept out of temperature control, or earlier if it deteriorates sooner
- If cold food is to be stored out of temperature control or in the event of a refrigerator breakdown, only do this for one period of up to 4 hours, after which time food must be discarded. Record and closely monitor this.
- See below for temperature guide



68 Any food which is unfit for human consumption must be kept apart from any other food and labelled 'unfit food'.

Personal Hygiene

69 Good personal hygiene practices should be always observed.

70 All food handlers working with open food must be assessed as fit to work and:

- Regularly wash their hands and cover any cuts with a blue, waterproof dressing
- Wear an apron
- Not wear jewellery that could pose a risk of contaminating food
- Not handle open food within 48 hours of displaying symptoms of gastro-enteritis, dysentery or any infection likely to cause food poisoning

Allegations of Food Poisoning/Allergic Reaction

71 All food poisoning and allergic reaction allegations must be investigated by the food provider identified by the claimant, in accordance with their HACCP plan. The venue should be notified immediately.

Non-Compliance

72 The venue reserves the right to stop any food or drink operation if it is found to be non-compliant or is deemed a risk to public safety.

Venue Specific Rules

73. Scottish Event Campus (SEC):

Cookers, Ovens and Fat Fryers

SEC allows the use of LPG for cookers, ranges and hobs. Where fat fryers are used, a muslin ceiling must be installed.

Sale and Supply of Alcohol

For conferences, where alcohol is purchased from SEC Food, or a corkage charge is paid and the alcohol is not being sold, then a Personal Licence Holder is not required.

Hand-Washing Facilities

The SEC has specific regulations that must be followed – please refer to the venue.

74. The O2 and Excel London– Cookers, Ovens and Fat Fryers

No deep fat frying/fryers are permitted in any of the special event spaces at The O2 and ExCeL London.

75. Coventry Building Society Arena and Excel London – General

If you are not using the exclusive venue catering partner to service your event, the external catering company used will need to go through an audit process – any costs associated to this process will need to be covered by the external catering company or client. Please speak to your Event Manager for further details.

76. Olympia Events

Kitchens/Food Preparation Areas

Cooking is only permitted in certain areas of the venue. Please speak to your Event Manager for further details.

Waste Disposal

Olympia Events promotes methods of reducing food waste via 'The Waste and Resources Action Programme' (WRAP). The venue asks organisers to promote the campaign to exhibitors and encourage them to use the free resources available at www.guardiansofgrub.com

