



# Tea Towels in the Food Industry

## Fines of up to \$2500 apply!

*Please ensure that all food handlers and business owners read this important information. Breaches relating to incorrect tea towel practices will result in fines of up to \$2500.*

Tea towels and other cloth towels are very absorbent due to their fabric weave. These material fibres aid in the multiplication of bacteria by providing an ideal environment for bacteria to lodge and as a result grow, potentially increasing the risk of cross contamination.

## The Law and Tea Towels

In accordance with the Food Safety Standards food handlers must, whenever washing their hands thoroughly dry their hands on a single use towel or in another way that is not likely to transfer pathogenic micro-organisms to their hands.

The Food Safety Standards also consider tea towels to be a piece of equipment and like all equipment used within a food business, they must be maintained in a good state of repair, be clean and adequate for safe and suitable food production and must not be a cause for the likelihood of contamination .

## Tea Towel Abuse

Environmental Health Officers often see food handlers abusing the use of tea towels by using them to:

- wipe/dry hands;
- cover food/s;
- wipe down benches over long periods of time;
- tuck them into aprons and use them for multiple purposes;
- hang them up to dry after use, ready for the next job; and
- dry food spills.

If a tea towel is contaminated, harmful bacteria not only survives but continues to multiply, especially if the tea towel is wet. A used tea towel can spread bacteria to your hands, as well as, to food contact surfaces such as equipment, crockery and cutlery.

## What You Should Never Do With a Tea Towel or Cloth Towel:

- wipe or dry your hands – instead use single use disposable towels;
- cover food – instead use food grade materials such as plastic wrap, aluminium foil, or lids to cover food. Single use paper towels can also be used temporarily to help keep foods protected and prevent condensation;
- hang them to dry for later – instead replace them with another dry clean towel;
- dry laundered cloths inside – instead dry towels in the sun to help kill harmful bacteria;
- use if soiled or wet- instead only use clean and dry towels.
- use the same towel for a number of different tasks – instead treat cloth towels as a single use item.



### **Useful Tips When it Comes to Tea Towels, Dishcloths, Bath Towels or Any Other Cloth Towel:**

- Try to eliminate the use of tea towels or any type of cloth material in your food premises.
- Allow dishes to air dry.
- If a tea towel must be used for drying dishes, ensure it is a fresh clean towel and is placed in a designated container to be laundered immediately after its single use.
- Use single use disposable towels for drying hands and cleaning benches.
- Do not reuse single-use disposable cleaning cloths, as they are not intended to have a multiple use.
- Ensure dishcloths used for washing dishes are kept clean and dry between uses.
- Soaking cloth towels in diluted bleach or boiling them is a good way to kill bacteria.

### **Celebrating Success**

The City of Charles Sturt participates in both the Food Safety Rating Scheme and Deliciously Safe Program. The Food Safety Rating Scheme is a state wide program. Eligible businesses have an opportunity to achieve a star rating (3, 4 or 5) based on their compliance with the food laws during their routine inspection. Businesses are awarded a certificate identifying their achieved Star Rating.

The Deliciously Safe program is a City of Charles Sturt initiative and provides an opportunity for businesses outside the scope of the Food Safety Rating Scheme to be recognised for full compliance with the food laws at the time of their routine inspection. Achieving businesses are awarded a sticker and certificate identifying the business as Deliciously Safe.

Both programs afford an opportunity for further recognition on Council's website and potential for listing in Council's community publications.

### **Need More Information?**

If you require further information regarding food safety or to receive a Food Safety Kit, please contact Council's Environmental Health Team. Furthermore, don't forget...you must always notify Council whenever you start a new food business, transfer ownership or change the food business name. Notification forms are available from Council or can be downloaded from the Council's website.

Check out our online Food Safety Training "I am Alert" via Council's webpage under [Services > Food Hygiene>Food Safety Training](#).