

HELPFUL INFORMATION FOR CONSUMER COMPLAINT LETTERS

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE IN FOOD SAFETY AND FOOD QUALITY???

FOOD QUALITY – related to the physical appearance of the food. A food may look bad (ie a broken cookie) so the quality is bad, but it will not cause a health problem if you eat it. Most SPOILAGE issues such as curdled milk, brown lettuce, mushy fruit, etc are QUALITY issues. They probably will not make you sick, but you don't want to eat it because it is unappealing.

FOOD SAFETY – A direct health hazard could occur if you eat the product. It contains either a chemical, physical or biological hazard. The food product may look and taste ok and not show any physical signs of having a problem, but it could still cause illness.

CHEMICAL, PHYSICAL AND BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS

BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS – disease-causing microorganisms. This would include food-borne pathogens such as Samonella, E. coli O157:H7, Listeria monocytogenes, Staphylococcus aureus, Clostridium botulinum, Clostridium perfringens, Campylobacter and any other disease causing pathogen

CHEMICAL HAZARDS – poisonous substances. Some examples that you might encounter in the food industry are sanitizer residues, oil/grease from equipment, antibiotic residues, pesticide residues, food allergens (ie peanuts being in a product that is not supposed to contain peanuts), and heavy metals

PHYSICAL HAZARDS – foreign objects such as glass, wood, rocks, metal, dead insects, etc.

In general, biological hazards cause the most severe illnesses. Chemical hazards cause illnesses over long period of time (ie. Exposure to pesticides could increase cancer risks). Physical hazards can result in bodily injury such as a chipped tooth, cut lip, etc.

The following example represents a food SAFETY issue because the product contains a physical hazard. Even though the hazard probably will not cause serious injury to the customer, it could cause choking or other bodily injury in certain circumstances.

Jane Smith
President
Yummy Yogurt Company
Anywhere, TX 77077

Dear Ms. Smith,

I am writing because I purchased 3 cartons of your strawberry yogurt on April 20 for my children at the Value Rite Supermarket in Anywhere. The expiration date on the cartons was April 30. While eating the yogurt we found small pieces of plastic in the product.

We kept the remaining product and would like a refund for it. I can be reached at 555-1212.

Thank you.

Sincerely,