



# Getting a lock on food safety

**Caterer**

By [Louise Oakley](#)



Le Meridién Abu Dhabi executive chef Dominique Morin.

**Food safety standards in the GCC are getting an overhaul, with governments leading the way by introducing new legislation to encourage F&B outlets in the region to work towards better hygiene principles.**

In Dubai, the recently launched 'Person in Charge' scheme, which will see a person trained and allocated to look after all aspects of food handling, is now a mandatory requirement for all F&B businesses in the emirate.

MGK managing partner Mirco Beutler explained that the Person In Charge (PIC) scheme would make a real difference to Dubai's food and beverage landscape.

"The PIC programme is very important for all of us. It makes a real difference for the F&B outlets which are maybe not four-or-five-star — so cafés, canteens in labour camps and so on, they will all have to comply with these regulations because everybody deserves to have safe food to eat," he said.

The rolling out of additional food safety guidelines was praised by Highfield chairman Richard Sprenger, who highlighted the importance of protecting consumers.

"The training of food handlers in food safety is essential to minimise the risk of food poisoning and to protect the tourist economy of Dubai," he said.

“The training of supervisors and managers in food safety is even more important. The PIC scheme is an exciting programme involving the food industry, Dubai Municipality, trainers and the Dubai Accreditation Centre, which will make a tremendous contribution to the training of managers and the safety of food premises in Dubai. The Municipality is to be commended for developing and leading the Person In Charge initiative,” Sprenger added.

Dubai is not alone in introducing new legislation to improve food safety standards; in Sharjah a new programme has recently been brought in, which will see the emirate aiming to eradicate cross-contamination.

Dr Rasha Ahmed Bin Sultan Al Qassemi, assistant general director of health, environment, and quality affairs for Sharjah, explained that it was important to raise levels of food safety awareness among the local population, while also creating a safe environment for visitors.

“This is a four-year programme,” Al Qassemi explained. “Our aim with the food is to totally prevent cross-contamination, making Sharjah a safe environment.”

The role of governments in developing such legislation has been key to improving food standards in the region, where municipalities such as Abu Dhabi have taken a strict line on food safety standards, to ensure that the emirate is leading the way in food hygiene.

“The government is implementing new things on a yearly basis,” said Cristal Hotel Abu Dhabi executive chef Johannes Petrus Schouten.

“You can’t implement a system like this in 24 hours or in a month — the chefs, the hotels; everybody has to adapt to this system so it’s all about constantly reviewing the rules. Everything is in place,” he said.

### **Unified approach**

Discussing the development of food safety in the GCC at the recently held Specialty Food Festival, Diversey Consulting Middle East regional director Abdul Rashid said the main task for governments would be achieving a harmonious approach.

He added that he expected this to be resolved within the next few years, predicting that by 2012, the GCC countries will have achieved “99% harmony”.

“One of the priorities is to achieve a standard across the countries,” Rashid said. “There needs to be a unified guide.”

However, Beutler argued that a GCC-wide set of hygiene regulations was a long way off, citing the variation in standards between different countries in the GCC as a barrier to region-wide regulations.

“The standards across the countries in the region are completely different,” he said.

“Dubai and Abu Dhabi, for example, are leading the way in food safety standards, whereas there are some countries in the GCC that have a long way to go to reach a similar level.”

Sprenger also said Dubai was the leader in terms of current standards, adding: “I believe that the standards of food safety in the hotels of Dubai are comparable to any of the hotels in the leading tourist areas in the world, especially with the implementation of the PIC programme. As with most countries the overall standards of food safety improve each year.”

Bashir Yousif, food safety expert for Dubai Municipality said that food safety was currently at the top of the Government’s agenda.

“The Food Control Department (FCD) of Dubai Municipality adopts the philosophy of effective partnership with its clients — this is the most effective way to ensure that all establishments follow the regulations,” he stressed.

“Additionally, the FCD involves all its partners in drafting new regulations or amending existing regulations. This has an excellent impact on the level of compliance by the establishments to the rules and regulations set by the Government,” he added.

The drive by GCC governments to push the food safety issue forward has not gone unnoticed by chefs, who welcomed the steps governments had taken in increasing hygiene standards across the region.

However, Le Meridien Abu Dhabi executive chef Dominique Morin added that F&B establishments must work alongside governments to ensure the rules were adhered to.

“It is both [the government and hotels]; we are working together. On one side you have the law and on the other side you have the customer and we are in the middle, so we cannot say who is taking the lead — the law is the law, you cannot do anything about that. But we work closely with the authority to guide us, we guide them so we work together,” he concluded.



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