

### The SALSA Requirement:

**“The business shall have a system for the management and documentation of product complaints including responses to complainants.”**

### About this SALSA Requirement:

This Requirement is intended to ensure a system is in place to deal with complaints to include recording and management of the process. Complaints should be dealt with quickly and effectively. The procedure should indicate what action should be taken when a complaint is received and what process should be followed to resolve the complaint.

#### Tools

- 🕒 A customer complaint form with sections to prompt the correct process and actions
- 🕒 Categorisation of complaints & a summary form to help identify any ‘trends’
- 🕒 Up-to-date lists of key contacts (clients, suppliers, authorities, laboratory contact, technical consultant)
- 🕒 Corrective Action procedure
- 🕒 Traceability system to identify other potentially affected batches.

#### Tips

- ✓ Nominate one senior manager (and a deputy) to be immediately informed when a complaint is received
- ✓ Always document complaints as they come into the business – record details to enable you to investigate
- ✓ Identify complaints as ‘food safety’ or ‘quality’ issues
- ✓ Consider if there is a common cause? Other batches could be affected.

### Additional Resources:

Complaint Handling links closely with several other sections of the SALSA Standard: See **Tools & Tips** for: 2.3 Corrective Action; 2.4.1 Traceability; 2.5 Managing Incidents.

### What do I need to do to show I comply with this Requirement?

Always record and investigate complaints in a systematic manner. Develop a suitable ‘form’ with section headers to prompt yourself through a logical sequence of questions. Ensure staff are clear on the process to be followed.

When a complaint is received identify if it is of a ‘food safety’ nature or a ‘quality’ nature. To help make that distinction, ask yourself: “Does the problem have the potential to cause



harm?” If the answer is ‘No’, it’s a ‘quality issue’ but if the answer is ‘Yes’ it could be a ‘food safety’ issue. The Immediate Action to take is slightly different for each of these cases; see below for the details, in stages, of dealing with complaints.

Stages of dealing with complaints:

- **Recording:** Take as much detail as you can regarding the complaint as this will help with the investigation. Keep a Complaints log.
- **Identify the issue:**
  - **Quality issue:** identify the issue & check remaining stock from the same batch. If the problem is likely to affect the whole batch, contact all clients who have received product from that batch, notify them of the problem & arrange to up-lift & replace with good stock.
  - **Food Safety:** contact all clients who have received stock from that batch; tell them what the problem is and instruct them not to use the affected products. Follow up quickly with a written ‘Recall’ or ‘Withdrawal’ notice. See **Tools & Tips** 2.5 Managing Incidents.
  - For either complaint type you may have to send off items to the laboratory for analysis to identify the issue.
- **Identify the cause:** there are normally at least two ‘levels’ of cause, one superficial and one underlying. For example, a product is sent out with one ingredient missing: the superficial cause is ‘someone forgot’. The underlying (root) cause may be lack of training/shortage of staff.
- **Corrective Action:** this is short-term action /damage limitation / restoring client confidence. It normally involves uplifting faulty items and replacing with good stock. Give a refund where relevant. Keep faulty items segregated and examine them to identify the ‘cause’ or perhaps the source of a foreign body. Is the cause a raw material fault that has potentially affected other batches?
- **Identify root cause:** this is crucial because it is only by identifying the root cause that you can put in place ‘preventative action’ – something to stop X ever happening again. See the Five ‘whys’ approach in the **Tools & Tips** for 2.3 Corrective Action. Consider if the root cause discovered needs an amendment to either the Quality Management System or your HACCP plan.
- **Categorise complaints & look for trends:** Complaints will happen; many will be ‘minor’. Categorising them is key to identifying trends that may point to an underlying cause. Simple categories are ‘flavour’ ‘odour’, ‘texture’, ‘foreign body’ etc. Use a ‘matrix’ to record this summary data; plotting a graph can help to see trends clearly.
- **Close out complaint:** Where relevant write to the customer to explain what you have done to prevent this happening again. Reimburse for purchase. You could also offer a voucher.



**What does a Complaint Record sheet look like?**

Complaint Record & Investigation Form	
Date.....	Complaint No .....
Customer Name.....	Contact name ..... Phone No..... Email.....
Product name..... Pack size.....	BB/UB Date..... Batch No.....
Complaint /Problem	If the complaint indicates someone has been harmed or the problem could cause harm, tell a Director immediately. [Name]..... informed
Cause: briefly, what was the 'simple' cause:	
Initial Corrective Action: (action to minimise customer dissatisfaction):	
Root cause:	
Preventative action (to deal with the root cause) What is to be done?..... Who is responsible for doing it?..... Agreed target completion date?.....	
Review (a few weeks later)	Date.....
Has the preventative action worked & will it minimise the chance of this problem happening again? <b>Yes/No</b> ( *If No, plan further preventive action using corrective action procedure) Sign-off by a Manager .....	
Issue: 1 Issue Date: 19/02/15 Issued By: J.P. Doc. Ref. 2.6 QM	

Complaint Summary (write down the complaint no. (from Complaints form)& mark one category						
Complaint no.	Odour	Flavour	Appearance	Texture	Illness	Foreign Body
Issue: 1 Issue Date: 19/04/15 Issued By: T.P. Doc. Ref. 2.6a QM						

**How can I use this example in my business?**

The above examples are typical Complaints Investigation & Complaints Summary forms that would meet the Requirement adequately. Develop forms that suit your business, train your staff in how to use them & **remember** to use them.