

# Controlling Foreign Materials

Brian Kraus Director of Food Safety and Regulatory Compliance, Wells Blue Bunny

## ***What is a Foreign Material Hazard?***

Foreign Material is any material that is not a natural component of a food, they can be a food safety hazards and must be included in a risk assessment of a HACCP Plan or Food Safety Plan. FDA defines a foreign object that presents itself as a food safety hazard as; *Hard or sharp foreign objects in food may cause traumatic injury including laceration and perforation of tissues of the mouth, tongue, throat, stomach and intestine as well as damage to the teeth and gums.* They further define it as: *product contains a hard or sharp foreign object that measures 7 mm to 25 mm, in length.*<sup>1</sup> Even objects that don't meet this legal definition can harm customers and your business (i.e. pits are OK in Cherries, but are not expected in Ice Cream)

## ***What it means to your business?***

Foreign materials in your product could harm a customer and impact your business, so committing to enhancing your food safety programs benefits your company in many ways. It is imperative that a thorough risk assessment is completed to identify and control anywhere your product could be contaminated. In a risk assessment, one would look at each step in your process to consider the introduction of any of these items as a potential risk and then identify appropriate control strategies. Because many ingredients in ice cream manufacturing are added to a 'mix' it is imperative to reach out to your suppliers to understand their risk assessment program and controls as well.

## ***Here's what you can do right now?***

Having good control programs provides a proactive approach rather than reacting after discovering a foreign material in your product. Control programs that catch foreign materials before they reach your customer reduce the risk to your brand, maintain your earned reputation, and save you money from expensive recalls or litigation. This can be accomplished by breaking your approach into "People" (awareness, training, culture...), "Programs" (preventive maintenance, sanitation, supplier controls...) and "Detection/Separation" (screens/strainers, metal detectors...) Examples include: conducting supply-chain reviews, inspecting ingredients when they arrive at your facility, conducting routine glass and brittle plastic self-audits of your facility, and anything else you identify for your location.

When building and designing your own program, it is important to involve team members throughout the process to get a broad understanding of potential foreign material introduction sites. Creation of a well-rounded team enhances buy-in and creates a positive food safety culture. Broad participation beyond the Food Safety and Quality Team, results in many sets of

dedicated eyes focused on identifying potential issues and a passionate workforce protecting your facility and brand. Continuous monitoring and re-assessment, especially when changing suppliers is important. Robust food safety systems are built one step at a time. It is never too late to begin.

For more on Foreign Material controls see this [CDR article](#) (pages 6-9) and visit [www.safeicecream.org](http://www.safeicecream.org) for additional resources, training options, and direct access to Ice Cream Food Safety Experts.

---

<sup>1</sup> FDA/ORA COMPLIANCE POLICY GUIDE CHAPTER - 5 SUB CHAPTER - 555 SECTION 555.425 -Foods - Adulteration Involving Hard or Sharp Foreign Objects