



Media Release

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SABS encourages consumers to pay attention to food safety

With loadshedding, water restrictions and warmer weather, the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) is encouraging consumers to be more vigilant when making food purchases by examining packaging and labels, and by ensuring that basic food hygiene practices are observed when purchasing and preparing food. The SABS is constantly reviewing and amending national standards to ensure that South Africans food sources and production processes can meet the minimum requirements of food safety.

“Food and food products spoil faster in warmer and humid conditions, and it is important that everyone be more vigilant regarding food safety. Retailers of food and food products need to ensure that the cold chain from suppliers to stores is in place and maintained until it is sold. Consumers can continue the cold chain by transporting food in cooler boxes or having it delivered direct to homes. With rising temperatures and loadshedding, consumers need to be aware of the impact of these elements on the storage of food and the potential of exposure to contamination.,” advises Sadvir Bissoon, Acting CEO of SABS.

Currently, the global standard for food safety is the Food Safety System Certification 22000 (FSSC 22000). The FSSC Certification is a complete food, feed and packaging safety certification scheme for the auditing and management of Food Safety Systems (FSMS). The scheme is offered and managed by the Foundation FSSC, recognised by the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI).

“It is important that the entire supply chain observes and is certified to comply with the requirements of SANS/ISO 22000. The SABS offers certification for companies and offers testing and verification services to food producers. In addition, the SABS can certify the refrigeration/cooling units of vehicles that transport food and food products. Our suite of laboratories can identify the nutritional percentage of ingredients, pesticides and chemicals, bacteria, microbes, fungi and any other substance that may be of benefit or harm to consumers,” explains Bissoon.

The SABS offers the following tips:

- If the stores do not have generators or alternative sources of power to ensure that the refrigeration units are functional, rather purchase food that was delivered on the day or ask the store manager for confirmation of 'fresh' produce
- Consumers are encouraged to examine packaging, to ensure that expiry dates are visible, packaging is not damaged and that purchases are made from reputable retailers.
- Do not purchase products that do not contain information about ingredients, nutritional information, storage advice, expiry dates, production dates or manufacturing information. If products should be refrigerated, ensure that the cooling/freezing of the products were not compromised before you purchase them.
- Transport food in cooler boxes that are cold to preserve food for longer periods of time.
- Look for verification, inspection or certification marks on products as products that are subjected to testing and certification offer better peace of mind that the production processes and product complies to SANS/ISO 22000
- Perishable food should be purchased in smaller quantities and used up as soon as possible
- Practice good food hygiene by washing hands regularly when handling food, wash and sanitise work surfaces and food equipment, and cook food well and for long enough.
- When storing and preparing food at home, keep food separately to avoid cross contamination, especially with fresh and perishable items such as meat, fish, poultry, eggs, dairy and fresh produce.
- Consumers need to engage their senses when handling food at home, for example if something looks and smells bad – rather throw it out or return it to the store for a refund if it has not been used.

SABS is a national standards body and does not have the regulatory authority to declare SANS 22000 or any other standard as a mandatory requirement. Our product certification scheme however addresses a recourse process when material non-compliances to the Standard are identified. SABS works with regulators and other industry bodies to set the requirements or standards for products and processes.

Bissoon explains that regulators such as the National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications (NRCS) and the National Department of Health (NDOH), the Department of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and the environment, have the authority to regulate certain types of food and food products, conduct inspections and when there is a potential health issue, have the power to recall products. SABS encourages regulators to actively participate in our technical committees that develop and publish national standards that seek to improve the quality of life of our citizens. SABS is also able to offer testing and certification services regarding food safety. The SABS Training Academy offers training in FSSC 22000 and remains a licensed training partner with Foundation FSSC.

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