



Thermatag temperature data logger - guidance for premises factsheet

Following the recent food safety inspection or visit, we highlighted concerns about cold temperature control. The use of a data logger to record temperatures over time was discussed with you and you have agreed to one being left in your fridge / chilled display unit. The following notes explain how it works and what the benefits are for you.

What is the Thermatag?

The device is used to monitor air temperature. It is usually used to measure cold air such as in a fridge, chilled display unit or freezer. The food safety officer sets it up on a computer in their office and places it in position in a unit in your premise for a time period that is agreed with you. When it is collected, the data is downloaded at the office and a graph produced which will show the air temperatures throughout the measuring period.

Why is air temperature important?

Ensuring high-risk ready-to-eat foods such as cooked meats, sandwiches, pate, sausage rolls, cooked rice and cooked pies etc are kept at the correct temperature is very important. These foods

are likely to support the growth of food poisoning bacteria or formation of toxins if stored above 8°C. Your fridge must operate at a temperature that will keep high-risk foods at or below 8°C.

If air temperatures are frequently high it is likely that food temperatures will also be high.

Why did the food safety officer suggest placing the thermatag in my fridge?

When an enforcement officer from Environmental Health carries out an inspection or visits following a complaint they may take the temperature of the air or food in your fridge or chilled display unit. However, this is only a one-off temperature measurement and sometimes this might be higher than 8°C. There are several reasons that this could happen, for example:

- The fridge may be on a defrost cycle at the time of the visit
- The fridge may need servicing or the dial adjusting to lower the temperature
- You may be using a domestic fridge that is not really adequate for commercial food business use
- The fridge display or thermometer you use and rely on to adjust the fridge temperature is not calibrated or checked and could be inaccurate

Other reasons for high food or air temperatures may relate to the way that the fridge is used or where it is located and this may be discussed at the time of the visit.

For example:

- Food has been placed in the unit from ambient storage e.g. recently opened tins of tuna
- The fridge is used for cooling cooked foods
- The fridge is located next to a cooker, other 'hot' equipment or in direct sunlight
- The air intakes, air outlets, the fins or grills of evaporators, defrost water channels and door seals may not have been cleaned recently, or the seals may be damaged.

Using the Thermatag will help us get a clearer picture of the way the fridge works over a longer period of time.

The graph produced when the data is downloaded can be looked at in relation to the way that the fridge is used and the way it works. For example: defrost periods will show as regular peaks, air temperatures are likely to be seen to decrease overnight or when the business is closed. Temperatures can vary during the working day, for example during busy periods when doors are frequently opened. If the fridge needs servicing or the temperature dial adjusting the air temperatures may be seen to be consistently high.

As a food business proprietor, you can use this system to your advantage. For example if you suspect that a unit may not be working properly and want a second opinion, you can call for advice and ask for the temperatures to be monitored for you.

What will happen when the 'Thermatag' is in my fridge or chilled unit?

- You will notice a green light occasionally flashing, this just tells you that it is recording.
- You may see a red light. Do not worry about this, as it is a high temperature alarm that can be set by the officer for a range of temperatures.

Hints on use

- Draw a diagram of the fridge. Move the logger around the fridge and leave it in position (i.e. top shelf, bottom shelf, middle shelf) for a few hours or a day at a time depending on how long the Thermatag will be at your premises. This will help locate the warmest and coldest areas. Note on the diagram the date and time it is left in a particular position.
- When in use the 'Thermatag' should be kept clean and dry, for example by placing in a food container.
- If you clean the fridge or chilled unit or remove the logger from it for any reason, ensure that you keep a record of the times so that it can be noted on the graph.

What will happen when the data is downloaded?

The food safety officer will look at the graph to determine whether the high reading taken at the time of the inspection was a one-off or whether there are patterns of high air temperatures. Then, depending on the findings the officer will send you a copy of the graph or will visit to talk about the results if they show repeated or consistent high temperatures. They will then discuss options available to you that will help reduce the air temperatures so that you can ensure that your food temperature is kept below 8°C, as required by the Food Safety (Temperature Control) Regulations 1995.

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