An Introduction to Document Control

BRC Global Standards. Trust in Quality
Document Control
The control of all documents within food safety and quality systems (for both external and internal use) is important to ensure all your staff consistently apply the correct, up-to-date procedures.

These documents may include policies, procedures, work instructions, records, forms, specifications and data lists and any information that is written down and defined. The requirements for document control applies to both hard copies i.e. paper documents and electronic documents within the food safety and quality system.

1.0 Requirements of the BRC Global Standard for Food Safety
In clause 3.2.1 of the BRC Global Standard for Food Safety it states:
The company shall have a procedure to manage documents which form part of the food safety and quality systems. This shall include:
• a list of all controlled documents indicating the latest version number
• the method for the identification and authorisation of controlled documents
• a record of the reason for any changes or amendments to documents
• the system for the replacement of existing documents when these are updated.

2.0 The aims of a document control procedure
This requirement of the Standard isn’t there to create extra bureaucracy for you but to help you effectively control your documents.

By having a document control procedure in place you can ensure:
• Documents are kept up-to-date
• All staff are working with the relevant version
• The potential for mistakes caused by multiple versions of a document is minimised
• Information is provided in a consistent form that can be used by the intended audience
• Information (e.g. production records) are retained that could help solve a problem or non-conformity

3.0 How to put a document control procedure in place
Your site must have a documented procedure that describes how documents are controlled and managed.

This will include:
• Identification of the individual(s) responsible for management of the system (i.e. who is authorised to issue or amend documents)
• The list of all controlled documents
• Methods of identification of controlled documents
• Records regarding the reasons for any changes
• The method of collecting and replacing documents
3.1 List of documents

Your site needs a list of all the documents within the food safety and quality system and typically this will include:

- The document identification or number. The Standard doesn’t set out how you should identify your documents but an example format would be using sequentially numbered documents or the use of an initial letter (often representing a department or activity) followed by a number (e.g. P0123).
- Document title. A concise title clearly explaining the purpose or content of the document e.g. Metal Detector Check Procedure.
- The current issue or version number. Each time the document is updated, amended or replaced a new version number should be used.
- The issue date. The date when the current version of the document first came into force.
- Withdrawal date (if applicable).
- Review date (if applicable). Documents may require periodic review to ensure the information remains applicable and up-to-date.
- The allocation of controlled copies i.e. who has a copy of the document.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Version Number</th>
<th>Issue Date</th>
<th>Withdrawal Date</th>
<th>Review Date</th>
<th>Allocated Copies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P101</td>
<td>Metal Detection Check Procedure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 June 2012</td>
<td>1 January 2013</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>J Jones B Brown S Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P101</td>
<td>Metal Detection Check Procedure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 January 2013</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>J Jones B Brown S Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P102</td>
<td>Product Check Weight Procedure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 January 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>S Smith G Green</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Identification and authorisation of your documents

The simplest way to identify your document is to include a footer on each page that contains the relevant information. This information may include:

- Document reference
- Issue or version number
- Title of document
- Date of issue
- Page number and total pages
You'll need to include a method of authorisation too, for example, a signature or a stamp, that identifies genuine copies of the document. Where these are held electronically it may be more convenient to label printed copies ‘uncontrolled copies’.

3.3 Making changes to your documents

When a document is changed, you'll need to make a note of the change and the reason for it.

You can do this by:

- Keeping a copy of the previous version with the reason for the change written on it, or
- Keeping a history of amendments log within each document.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Changes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Jan 11</td>
<td>New metal detector purchased which needed to be reflected in this procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Sept 11</td>
<td>Frequency of checks updated to reflect requirements of a new customer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A new issue or revision always replaces an existing document. You must not have two different issues or revisions of the same document at any time.

You'll also need to ensure that any policy or procedure changes are communicated to the relevant staff. This can be done by highlighting the change within the new document or by specific training prior to issue of the new version.

3.4 Replacing your documents

You'll need to keep a record of all controlled documents and their allocation, so whenever a document is updated or replaced the person responsible can ensure each old copy is returned and the new version issued. The easiest way to do this is by using a sign off sheet, where staff sign to indicate they have returned the previous version and collected their new edition.
Quick Tips

- Ensure a single, clear procedure operates across the entire food safety and management system
- Ensure the list of documents remains up-to-date
- Remove old editions of documents from the site
- Ensure staff are aware of the correct document versions
- Don’t have two versions of the same document circulating at the same time. Systematically collect all old versions.

These short guides are designed for companies involved in the enrolment program and aim to help you interpret the Standard, and design robust systems and procedures that meet the requirements. Examples are given to explain the types of documents and procedures and the level of detail typically required. However, you’ll need to consider the context relevant to your business. The implementation of the Standard, and whether a resulting system is considered to be conforming or non-conforming by an auditor, is an objective judgement which can only be based on the evidence collected and observations made during the audit.

Further details regarding the BRC Global Standard for Food Safety can be obtained from enquiries@brcglobalstandards.com