

Guidelines on the Use of Disposable Plastic Food Containers

Objective:

Disposable plastic food containers are commonly used for takeaway food. However, improper use of these containers may affect food safety. For example, high temperature may cause the foam boxes to dissolve, resulting in melting traces and migration of harmful substances to contaminate the food. This guideline is intended to remind the food industry about the issues they should pay attention to when using disposable plastic food containers.

Scope:

Premises that use disposable plastic food containers for holding food, including dine-in or takeaway shops, supermarkets, etc.

Definition:

Disposable plastic food containers (hereinafter referred to as "containers"): refer to containers that are made of plastic materials for holding food and disposed of after use. Commonly used plastic materials include polyethylene terephthalate (PET), polypropylene (PP), polystyrene (PS) and expanded polystyrene (EPS, commonly known as foam), etc.

Content:

1. Smart Purchase and Receipt

- Purchase containers from reputable suppliers;
- Take into account the characteristics of food to be contained in the selection of suitable containers (see Annex);
- Upon receipt of goods, check whether there are any signs of damages or contamination on the surface of the containers.

2. Proper Storage

- Containers should be properly wrapped and placed in storage cabinets or on shelves. Do not place containers directly on the ground;
- Containers should be stored separate from food. Avoid putting them under direct sunlight or near heat sources;
- Adopt the "first-in, first-out" principle in stock keeping.

3. Use with Caution

- Check whether the containers are in good conditions before use. Discard damaged or contaminated ones immediately;
- Select food to be contained in appropriate containers according to the properties of the plastic materials of containers (see Annex);
- Use containers with good heat resistant property e.g. polypropylene (PP) for holding hot food. Avoid using those with poor heat resistant property, e.g. polystyrene (PS) and expanded polystyrene (EPS);
- For deep-fried food, use insulation paper (such as aluminum foil) or oil absorbing paper to separate food from the container. Avoid direct contact between deep-fried/high-fat food and the containers to prevent migration of harmful substances;
- Avoid packing food too early in advance in order to shorten the time during which the food is in contact with the containers;
- If the containers are deformed after holding food, stop using the containers and discard the food contained immediately;
- Do not re-use disposable plastic containers;
- If in doubt about the safety of the containers used, stop using them.

Annex Properties and codes of disposable plastic food containers

Type of Plastic	Properties	Code
Polyethylene terephthalate (PET)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Poor heat resistance ● Not suitable for food at temperatures over 80°C ● Not microwavable 	
Polypropylene (PP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Good heat resistance ● Suitable for food at high temperatures (about 100-140°C) ● Microwavable 	
Polystyrene (PS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Poor heat resistance ● Not suitable for food at temperatures over 100°C ● Not microwavable 	
Expanded polystyrene (EPS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Poor heat resistance ● Not suitable for food at temperatures over 100°C ● Not microwavable 	

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) reminds the food industry and the public to care for the earth and preserve natural resources!

- Avoid using disposable plastic tableware and containers;
- Encourage customers to bring their own tableware and containers;
- Avoid using plastic bags and encourage customers to bring their own reusable shopping bags.

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