

Food labelled in a foreign language

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This guidance is for England and Wales

EU Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 *on the provision of food information to consumers* states that, where labelling is required, it should be "in a language easily understood by the consumers of the Member States where a food is marketed". In the UK this is accepted as being in English and it is therefore an offence for retailers or wholesalers to supply food without English labelling.

The Regulation requires certain compulsory information, which must be in English and appear either on a label on (or attached to) the packaging, or on a label clearly readable through the packaging.

Definition of food

'Food' is defined to include not only substances that we would normally associate with the term, but also:

- drink
- chewing gum and similar products
- substances of no nutritional value, which are used for human consumption
- articles and substances used as ingredients in the preparation of food

Responsibilities of retailers

They must make sure that all food and drink they sell displays all the compulsory information. This must be in English, although it does not preclude also having the labelling in additional languages when some of the customers are likely to be non-English speakers.

This information should appear on one of the following:

- on a label on the packaging
- on a label attached to the packaging
- on a label clearly readable through the packaging

Responsibilities of wholesalers

EU Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 requires that if food is "intended for the final consumer but marketed at a stage prior to sale to the final consumer" it must comply with the Regulations.

Food is considered to be ready for delivery to the ultimate consumer if the packaging will not be changed prior to sale by the eventual retailer. The wholesaler must, therefore, ensure that the food complies with the Regulations unless the retailer will repackage it. For example, a wholesaler sells cans of soft drinks to retailers in trays. The cans themselves will not be altered before reaching the ultimate consumer. The soft drink is, therefore, ready for delivery to the ultimate consumer and must have the correct labelling in English.

The information on food sold by wholesalers must appear as described above for retailers. Alternatively, the compulsory information (please see 'Labelling of prepacked foods: general') can be supplied on documentation supplied previously or accompanying the food. However, if this method is used, the name of the food, durability indication, storage conditions and business details must appear on the external packaging.

The same rules apply to the packaging of food sold to catering establishments* if food is prepared in the course of a business and is intended to be supplied to the consumer in that packaging. [*'Catering establishments' include restaurants, canteens, pubs, clubs, schools or similar, and mobile caterers such as fast food vans.]

Where the food is not intended to be sold to consumers in the packaging (for instance, where it is intended to be sold to a catering establishment) less compulsory information is required.

'Labelling of prepacked foods: general' provides information on the compulsory requirements for all prepacked foods. This applies to all food labelling in the UK, regardless of whether the food is produced here or not.

If you are considering importing food from outside the UK, you may also find it useful to look at the information on imported food on the Food Standards Agency website. This site provides information about the legal requirements affecting different types of food that you may be considering importing (not only labelling).

Penalties

Failure to comply with trading standards law can lead to enforcement action and to sanctions, which may include a fine and/or imprisonment. For more information please see 'Trading standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

Key legislation

Food Safety Act 1990

EU Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 *on the provision of food information to consumers*

Food Information Regulations 2014

Food Information (Wales) Regulations 2014

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Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links may only show the original version of the legislation, although some amending legislation is linked to separately where it is directly related to the content of a guide. Information on amendments to legislation can be found on each link's 'More Resources' tab.

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