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trading standards law explained

Retail sale of pet food

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In this guide, the words 'must' or 'must not' are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word 'should' is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

Although the United Kingdom left the European Union (EU) in 2021, certain pieces of legislation (known as 'assimilated law') continue to apply until such time as they are replaced by new UK legislation, revoked or permitted to expire. This means that our guidance still contains references to legislation that originated from the EU.

This guidance is for England

This guide covers the labelling of any type of compound or manufactured pet food that is on sale either loose (from bins, hoppers or other retail bulk displays) or in small prepacks you make up yourself by breaking down larger packs.

If you buy in prepacked containers or packages, which you then offer for sale, these should have already been labelled by the manufacturer or supplier.

The pet food must be labelled with the mandatory labelling requirements; this is sometimes referred to as a 'statutory statement'.

What is a compound pet food?

A compound pet food is a product comprising a mixture of at least two ingredients (with or without additives), usually in the form of a coarse mix, kibbles / biscuits, or as a wet food in tins or pouches.

Approval and registration

The retailing of pet food is an activity exempt from feed business approval / registration requirements.

Where a pet food retailer breaks down larger packs into smaller quantities, and this does not result in a new formulation or any change to the characteristics of the product, the activity remains 'retail'. Approval / registration is not required, provided that the original labelling information is retained, and the original business name and address remains on the labelling.

However, where activities go beyond simple retail, then the business would be considered a feed business operator and feed business registration would be required. For example:

- The product is mixed or altered resulting in a new formulation or change in characteristics
- The product is repackaged and rebranded, with a different business name and address applied

Where repackaging involves products containing animal by-products (ABP), and the activity includes adding ingredients, processing, or the handling of raw pet food, approval from the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) is likely to be required, in addition to any feed business registration. Information on using ABPs in pet food production can be found on the GOV.UK website.

Manufacturing your own pet foods

If you manufacture or mix your own pet foods for sale, please contact your local Trading Standards service for further advice, as this is a complex area, always requiring prior registration and/or approval. This includes manufacturing pet food in domestic houses and other premises.

See 'Manufacturing your own pet foods' for more information, including details of how to apply for approval / registration.

Labelling

The pet food must be labelled with both the general mandatory labelling requirements and specific mandatory labelling requirements.

General mandatory labelling requirements:

- Type of feed - for example, 'feed material', 'complete feed', 'complementary feed'. For pets other than cats and dogs, the designation 'complete feed' or 'complementary feed' may be replaced by 'compound feed'. The designation 'pet food' is also allowed
- Name or business name and address of the feed business operator responsible for the labelling
- Establishment approval number, if available
- Batch or lot reference number
- Net quantity
- List of feed additives, preceded by the heading 'additives'

- Moisture content, if it exceeds 14%

Specific mandatory labelling requirements:

- Species or categories of animals for which the compound feed is intended
- Instructions for proper use indicating the purpose for which the feed is intended - for example, amount per animal per day, or percentage of total daily ration
- In cases where the producer is not the person responsible for the labelling, the name and address of the producer or an identification number
- Minimum storage life: 'use before ...' followed by the date DD/MM/YY for highly perishable feed; 'best before ...' followed by the date MM/YY for other feed
- List of feed materials in descending order by weight, based on the moisture content, under the heading 'Composition'
- For pet animals, the specific name of a feed material may be replaced by the category name. A list of categories has been established (see the link to the code of good labelling practice below)
- If special emphasis is placed on a feed material on the labelling (for example, by words, pictures or graphics), then the name and percentage weight must be indicated
- Compulsory declarations of crude fibres, crude protein, crude fat and crude ash under the heading 'analytical constituents'. Without affecting the analysis for pet food, certain replacement expressions may be used instead:
    - 'Crude protein' may be replaced by 'protein'
    - 'Crude fat' may be replaced by 'fat content'
    - 'Crude ash' may be replaced by 'incinerated residue' or 'inorganic matter'
- Pet food manufacturers must provide contact details - for example, a free telephone number for purchasers wishing to obtain information on feed additives and the names of feed materials within a category
- Pet foods that are made up of (or contain) raw meat and other unprocessed animal products may be contaminated with harmful bacteria. Raw pet food must be labelled with a compulsory statement: 'Use as pet food only. Keep apart from food. Wash hands and clean tools, utensils and surfaces after handling this product'. More information on handling raw pet foods is available on the GOV.UK website

Labelling presentation

If the pet food arrives in a package or container, the labelling particulars should be included either directly on the container or on a label attached to it (subject to minor exemptions). Where the material arrives in bulk, the information can be supplied in accompanying documentation.

The labelling particulars must be given in a conspicuous, clearly legible and indelible manner, and in English. The particulars must be easily identifiable and not obscured by any other information. The labelling and presentation of the pet food must not mislead the user as to its nature, method of manufacture, quantity, durability or composition, nor to the species of animal for which it is intended.

Loose

When selling pet food loose (as either a feed material or compound feed) from bins or hoppers, the required mandatory labelling particulars (see above) may be displayed at the point of sale in a conspicuous place (either attached to the bin or with the feed) in such a way that it is clear to which product it relates.

In these circumstances, some of the mandatory information is exempt from being displayed at the point of

sale, and instead must be provided to the purchaser at the latest on or with the invoice, as follows:

- **Feed materials.** The type of feed, the name of the feed material and the compulsory declaration (see Annex V to assimilated Regulation (EC) No 767/2009 *on the placing on the market and use of feed* (link in 'Key legislation' below))
- **Compound feed.** The type of feed, the species or category of species for which the feed is intended and instructions for proper use

This only relates to feed sold loose in quantities not exceeding 20 kg and intended for the final user.

Where pet food is sold loose, care must be taken to ensure that any use-before / best-before dates and batch numbers are updated when new stock is added. Consideration must also be given to efficient and effective stock rotation to ensure the accuracy of information given on the labelling.

Prepacks

For prepacks that you make yourself, you must mark each pack with the required mandatory labelling particulars (see above). However, for 'multipack' pet food (such as one package with several containers, where the total weight of the package is not more than 10 kg) the full mandatory labelling only needs to be given on the outer packaging instead of on each container. The containers within the multipack must be labelled with at least the following:

- Type of feed (as above)
- Species or categories of animals for which the compound feed is intended
- Batch or lot reference number
- Minimum storage life
- Net quantity
- Storage conditions, if specific or appropriate

Distance sales (selling online etc)

Where pet food is offered for sale by means of distance communication (internet or telephone sales, for example), the general mandatory labelling requirements and specific mandatory labelling requirements (see earlier) must either appear on the material supporting the distance selling or be provided prior to the conclusion of a distance contract. There are exceptions for the following:

- Name or business name and address of the feed business operator responsible for the labelling
- Batch or lot reference number
- Net quantity
- Minimum storage life

There are other requirements that you must follow when selling at a distance (not specifically related to labelling). Please see 'Consumer contracts: distance sales' for more information.

Further information

The advice contained within this guide dictates the information that must be provided on any pet food labelling. Further optional information may also be provided. The European Commission encouraged the development of the *Code of Good Labelling Practice for Pet Food*. Certain EU laws have been 'assimilated'

into UK law, and the codes should be consulted as a guide to aid compliance with current labelling requirements.

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards services and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law, please see 'Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

In this update

Information added relating to distance sales and feed business registration requirements.

Last reviewed / updated: May 2026

Key legislation

- Assimilated Regulation (EC) No 767/2009 *on the placing on the market and use of feed*
- Assimilated Regulation (EC) No 1069/2009 *laying down health rules as regards animal by-products and derived products not intended for human consumption (Animal by-products Regulation)*
- Assimilated Regulation (EU) No 142/2011 *implementing Regulation (EC) No 1069/2009 and Directive 97/78/EC*
- Animal By-Products (Enforcement) (England) Regulations 2013
- Animal Feed (Composition, Marketing and Use) (England) Regulations 2015

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 go to the legislation.gov.uk website. The site usually updates the legislation to include any amendments made to it. However, this is not always the case. Information on all changes made to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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