



Meet the Team

Ruthchell Cerenio, Port Health Officer

Tell us who you are and what you do

I'm Ruthchell though people here call me 'Ruth'. I carry out checks on commercial imports of high-risk food, feed and other products sent for inspection at the Border Control Post in Sevington.

What does that involve?

I mostly focus on CHED Ps which are for products of animal origin, germinal product, animal by-products and composite products. CHEDs are the notifications we get from traders importing goods into the UK that are crucial for demonstrating compliance. In full they're known as Common Health Entry Documents

What about food storage?

We do inspect some plastics that might have contact with food. We make sure that all are chemical free and will not transfer to food or risk being ingested by people. In technical terms, we must check that all plastics that come into contact with food are food grade. Traders need to submit a plastic declaration and sampling that we check before we can decide if those products are safe to enter the UK.

How long have you worked at Sevington BCP?

I've been here for three years although Ashford Port Health itself became operational in April 2024. In the beginning I was dealing with Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing controls (IUU) checking catch certificates.

How do you maintain your knowledge as a Port Health Officer?

To qualify for the job, I had to acquire a higher certificate in food control and then acquire a certificate of higher education in food safety and legislation from the University of Birmingham. I've also taking courses to be qualified as a fish inspector. Currently, I am pursuing an online three-year MSc in Environmental Health at the University of Derby. This is part of my pathway to becoming an Environmental Health Practitioner.

What were you doing before working at the Sevington Border Control Post?

I was teaching for 15 years in the Philippines, where I'm originally from. I love the challenge of studying though it's taking me a while to get used to calling Professors by their first name.

How did you come to be interested in food hygiene?

When I moved here in 2018, I took a job in a deli where they made us study all about food and hygiene. My husband is a Vet so that gave me some knowledge of the world that I'm now in. I then applied to be a Technical Assistant and the academic in me enjoyed reading about all the legislation. My time in the deli also gave me a good grounding in what to look out for. Hygiene ratings, for example. The food may not be great, but you know it's clean.

Describe a typical day

At the start of the day, I'll sit down and check my emails and start looking for notifications coming in. There might be hundreds asking for updates on what's happening with their consignments. We'll do the documentary

checks, the seal checks for lorries, the identity checks and the physical inspections as well. We also do the sampling and then we communicate with the laboratory to do the testing and then send the results to the traders and haulage agents.

In short, we'll work alongside our vets to check that food is actually safe to be brought into the UK. No day is ever dull. Every day is a school day. You learn new things, because no two inspections are the same.

Describe a memorable inspection

Normally this company is really good. We've dealt with them many times. When the lorry had been opened, for one particular consignment, I could see all this water. It was clear there was a problem with the temperature control. The consignment should have remained chilled/frozen. Instead, it had got warm, and the fish was stinking.

The traders wouldn't have been happy as we had to detain and destroy the consignment but we had no choice as it was simply not safe for human consumption. People could have become sick. Further investigation proved that there was a problem with the refrigeration in the lorry.

What it's like being part of the Ashford Port Health team?

It's a collaborative effort from the hardworking Technical Assistants who create and charge the jobs for us, to our Port Health Officers who carry out the inspections with the team of Vets. Everyone contributes, helping each other to protect Public Health and Animal Health.

What is the one tip you give to traders or importers of goods?

They should read the legislation. It is very thorough with guidance to help them understand and they can always ask us too, if they need anything

explained. In the long run, it benefits them in terms of bringing food into the UK that is safe to consume.

Why is your role so important?

If you're working in in this field, then you should remember you have a big task on your shoulders. Yeah, the lives of people and the health of people is on your shoulders. So, if you're a Port Health Officer or a Vet, before you validate something, before you allow a consignment to come in and cross the border, you have to make sure it's actually safe.

What do you love about what you do?

It's been a great opportunity for me to give something back to the UK. A lot of people don't know anything about what we do at Ashford Port Health. Not all heroes wear capes. We wear white coats, PPE, hair nets and safety shoes. We're saving the world one inspection at a time.