



# SNACK ATTACK

Demelza Rayner discusses whether trade show organisers should consider enforcing a nut-free buying environment

I was contacted recently by a bridal shop owner, whose employee has a severe nut allergy and regularly encounters these salty snacks being offered on stands at trade exhibitions. Such is the extent of the employee's allergy that she only needs to be in the vicinity of peanuts for a reaction to occur. So, what's the solution? To make the entire exhibition a nut-free zone? After-all, visitors may also pose a risk to this individual if they've brought their own peanut-containing snacks. Or is this an overreaction to a very small number of bridal buyers who share the exact same allergy?

Speaking to trade show organisers, while there's clear sympathy for the individual concerned, they're reluctant to make a sweeping change to current policy for fear of 'opening the floodgates'. Peanuts may be one of the top 10 allergens in the UK, but there are a host of other food substances, for example eggs and milk, that can also cause serious reactions – should these be banned too? And where would liability be if an exhibition promoted itself as 'nut-free' and then a visitor had a severe allergic reaction because a stand holder had missed that line of text in the stand terms and conditions?

This issue is a complex one, with any decisions no doubt having far reaching ramifications for show organisers. For example, we spoke to Kayleigh Kowalewski, Senior Operations Manager at Hyve Group plc who highlighted just how far it would have to go in order to completely ban nuts altogether. She says, "Currently we do not specifically deter our exhibitors from offering any sort of food stuff from their stands as long as they are operating within the guidance laid out within the E-Guide. In addition, as the NEC has numerous food outlets serving a vast array of options, we would need to enter into a larger conversation related to how far our control measures could reach. With that said, however, we do try to accommodate

each of our visitors as far as we are able and is practical, so would always encourage anyone to contact us directly via our website."

Most schools in this country are now nut-free zones, with reports suggesting that there is at least one pupil in each school who is allergic to peanuts. But – as yet – there's no real policy for other public areas. Should bridal show organisers lead the way, setting an example to other exhibitions, or should they simply follow current Government guidelines?

Odette Lister, owner of Brides by Solo, outlines why this issue is so close to her heart. She says, "My joint-buyer has a serious nut allergy and so trying to make important purchasing decisions while nuts are laid out in open bowls on stands at bridal trade shows is a serious problem." She continues, "The most severe allergic reaction to peanuts is anaphylaxis – a life-threatening whole-body response to an allergen. Symptoms may include impaired breathing, swelling in the throat, a sudden drop in blood pressure, pale skin or blue lips, fainting, shortness of breath and difficulty breathing."

It's not my place to rule whether exhibitions should be nut-free zones, but at the very least I hope this prompts debate and encourages stand holders to be mindful of the negative health effect this has on those who have this allergy. Most bridal firms go over and above for their customers and – by considering carefully what food substances they offer to visitors at exhibitions – this can only reflect positively on the brand, while safeguarding allergy sufferers.

*If you have a topic you'd like editor Demelza Rayner to discuss, contact her at [editor@attirebridal.com](mailto:editor@attirebridal.com)*