Cyber-attacks disrupt supermarket cooling across Europe

LEVEL C1



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I. WARM-UP

1. Have you ever lost food because a fridge failed? What happened?
2. Which devices at home can you control remotely?
3. What risks can a company face from a cyber-attack?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

undermine
to make something weaker or less trusted

hybrid
combining different methods, such as digital and physical tactics

patch
to fix software by adding a small update

spokesperson
a person who officially gives information for an organisation

disruption
a serious break in normal activity or services

evaporator
the part of a fridge that removes heat to make cold air

defrost
to remove ice or switch a device to a warming mode

cybersecurity
the protection of computers and networks from attack

III. READING

Retailers in Belgium, Estonia, Ireland, Finland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden confirmed problems with shop refrigeration, with some units reaching 50C.

The EU food and agriculture commissioner, Christophe Hansen, called the repeated cyber-attacks deeply concerning because they could disrupt the food supply chain and undermine consumers' confidence.

The incidents echoed an attack in France last month that hit up to 700 supermarkets and caused food losses estimated in the tens of millions of euros.

Authorities fear government-sponsored hybrid attacks because many devices can be monitored and controlled remotely, a concern sharpened since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. In Sweden, Coop said six shops were hit, and ICA reported a limited number of affected stores.

One ICA shop in Sjöbo said its fridges and freezers were set to 50C; another in Stockholm blamed a 2am cyberattack. Sweden's national cybersecurity centre head, John Billow, said many operational technology devices needed updating or patching.

In Belgium and Luxembourg, Ahold Delhaize said dozens of sites were affected; reporters saw empty cases and a notice about cyberattacks. Its spokesperson, Sarah De Meester, said fresh and frozen ranges were temporarily limited.

Stephan Moelans of Sabcobel said technicians disconnected affected installations after evaporators were switched to defrost mode. Colruyt, Intermarché and Carrefour Belgium also reported disruption, with about 15 Carrefour shops affected.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **The Guardian***: "Shop fridges and freezers across Europe hit...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What maximum temperature did some units reach?
2. Which seven countries reported refrigeration problems?
3. What earlier incident do these events echo, and what losses were estimated?
4. Why do authorities fear hybrid attacks on cooling systems?
5. Name two specific responses by retailers or technicians mentioned in the text.

V. DISCUSSION

1. How vulnerable is the food supply to attacks on cooling systems?
2. Should stores connect cooling units to the internet? Why or why not?
3. What first steps should retailers take after such an incident?
4. How should countries coordinate responses across borders?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Formal multiword connectors

Fixed formal multi-word phrases link ideas in serious writing. Use the exact wording; changing a small part makes them wrong. Common sets: notwithstanding the fact that; on the grounds that; by virtue of; in accordance with; in conjunction with.

> "**Notwithstanding the fact that** *technicians were mobilised, fridges failed.*"
>
> "**On the grounds that** *evaporators were in defrost, installations were disconnected.*"

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. Teams acted (with a view to / with a view of) limiting losses. _____
2. Shops may close (in the event that / in the event of) an attack. _____
3. Officials helped, (insofar as / insofar that) they could. _____
4. Work slowed (on account to / on account of) outages. _____
5. Measures were limited (on basis of / on the basis of) risk. _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.



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I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8–10 minutes warm-up, 10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading and comprehension, 10 minutes grammar, 10–12 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach or check: how to say Sjöbo, Luxembourg and Ahold Delhaize; review key terms (cybersecurity, patch, defrost, evaporator, disruption).
- Run the reading in two passes: gist for main events, then detail to map who was hit and how they responded. The story touches geopolitics; begin discussion in pairs so students may talk about the news rather than personal experiences.
- Differentiate: stronger students sketch a timeline across countries; others focus on causes and effects using connectors such as however, moreover and as a result.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Start by mapping the cold chain on the board; push for evidence from the text (50C, multi-country, remote control).
2. Take a quick show of hands, then pair students to argue the opposite side, weighing remote monitoring against risk.
3. Elicit steps from the text (disconnect installations, limit ranges, notices, mobilise technicians) and ask for a sequence.
4. Put groups of three on a mini-plan: who shares what with whom and when, citing the EU commissioner's concerns.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Debate: In two teams, write and deliver 90-second statements for or against connecting fridges to the internet.

Writing: In pairs, draft a 100-word in-store notice explaining the incident and temporary product limits.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

Grammar exercise: Formal multiword connectors

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

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IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What maximum temperature did some units reach?
   Up to 50C.
2. Which seven countries reported refrigeration problems?
   Belgium, Estonia, Ireland, Finland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden.
3. What earlier incident do these events echo, and what losses were estimated?
   A French attack last month on up to 700 supermarkets, with losses in the tens of millions of euros.
4. Why do authorities fear hybrid attacks on cooling systems?
   Because many devices are controlled remotely, and concerns grew after Russia's 2022 invasion.
5. Name two specific responses by retailers or technicians mentioned in the text.
   Technicians disconnected installations; Ahold Delhaize limited fresh and frozen ranges.

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Fixed formal multi-word phrases link ideas in serious writing. Use the exact wording; changing a small part makes them wrong. Common sets: notwithstanding the fact that; on the grounds that; by virtue of; in accordance with; in conjunction with. (Examples constructed.)

> "**Notwithstanding the fact that** *technicians were mobilised, fridges failed.*"
>
> "**On the grounds that** *evaporators were in defrost, installations were disconnected.*"

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. Teams acted (with a view to / with a view of) limiting losses. **with a view to**
2. Shops may close (in the event that / in the event of) an attack. **in the event of**
3. Officials helped, (insofar as / insofar that) they could. **insofar as**
4. Work slowed (on account to / on account of) outages. **on account of**
5. Measures were limited (on basis of / on the basis of) risk. **on the basis of**