

Food *for thought*

Summer 2021, Volume 13 Issue 2

A newsletter for Fairfax County food establishment owners and operators and their employees

Summer is Here: Check & Monitor Your Refrigerators

This time of year, the temperature out-side goes up and often the temperature in the kitchen goes up, too. This can put a strain on the refrigeration units in the kitchen. Most refrigerators are de-signed to run best at room temperatures BELOW 85°F. What are you doing to keep refrigeration properly maintained in your food establishment? Is your food stored at 41°F or less to prevent the growth of foodborne bacteria? Here are three steps to help keep your refrigerators cold and the food at the safe temperature:

- **Service refrigerators and freezers ahead of the hot summer season.** If a refrigerator reads 41°F two hours before opening, it is doubtful that it will keep that temperature during the busy lunch rush. Set the

temperature at 35° to 37°F when the refrigerators are not in use. Check refrigerator temperatures first thing in the morning. If refrigerators are set at the correct temperature, they should keep food at 41°F or less, even during the busy times of business.

- **Ensure all refrigerators have a built-in temperature gauge or an internal thermometer.** Refrigeration units under and across from the cookline can be a challenge because they may have to work harder to maintain 41°F. Check temperatures throughout the day. A temperature log is a good active managerial control that can be used to track refrigerator and food temperatures during the day. Your

area inspector can help you set up a temperature log, if necessary. If food temperatures are going up, adjust the refrigerator setting and temporarily move the food to a refrigerator that will cool the food quickly and keep the proper temperature.

- **Refrigerate food right away.** When food is delivered, put it in the refrigerator quickly. When left unrefrigerated, the food temperature will quickly move into the “danger zone” (41° - 135°F). In the “danger zone,” foodborne bacteria can grow more quickly and possibly make people sick.

Proper refrigeration and temperature control of foods are important steps in reducing the risk of foodborne illness.

Ice is Food, Too

Ice, like all food ingredients, is subject to contamination if not handled correctly. It is easy to overlook that ice, like all food, can be the cause of a foodborne illness outbreak. You may think that the cold temperature of ice kills bacteria; however, the cold temperature does not necessarily kill the bacteria—it may merely preserve the germs until conditions are better for rapid bacteria growth, which can lead to contamination.

Cold temperatures slow germ production, but when ice begins to melt, conditions improve for bacteria growth and germ populations can explode. If a beverage is cooled by contaminated ice or food is stored in contaminated ice, a foodborne illness may be transmitted to people when the beverage or food is consumed. Because ice has very little

defense against germs once it begins to melt, it is important to prevent contamination from the start.

Handling ice with contaminated hands or utensils is the most common cause of illness linked to ice. The most effective way to prevent ice contamination is to use dedicated ice scoops and buckets and to train employees never to handle ice with their bare hands. Ice-only utensils (ice scoops) will help prevent cross-contamination from other potentially hazardous foods, such as red meat, poultry or fish. In addition, keep ice bins clean. Another important step is to clean ice machines and ice bins regularly to prevent soil and mold buildup.

Proper cleaning means turning the machine off, emptying the

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What to Do in an Electrical Outage

An electrical power outage will affect the safe storage of refrigerated and frozen foods. Perishable food such as meat, poultry, seafood, milk and eggs that are not kept properly refrigerated or frozen may cause illness if eaten. To protect these foods from spoiling, follow these guidelines:

Keep a digital dial, or instant-read thermometer inside refrigerators and freezers to accurately monitor the temperatures until power is restored.

Refrigerator and freezer doors must be kept closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature. The refrigerator will keep foods cold for 2 to 4 hours if it is unopened. Full freezers will hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours if the door remains closed. These times may vary depending on age of the unit, temperature setting and amount of food that is inside the refrigerator.

Foods that are above 41°F for more than 2 hours must be discarded.

Do not trust your sense of smell. Food may be unsafe even if it does not smell bad.

Thawed food may be used if it is still below 41°F or it may be re-frozen if it still contains ice crystals or is below 41°F. Partial thawing and refreezing may reduce the quality of some food, but the food will remain safe.

Follow the Golden Rule of food safety, “When in Doubt, Throw it Out,” for any foods that you are not sure have stayed at a safe temperature.

In the event of a power outage, the establishment should voluntarily close. Notify the Health Department of the closure by calling 703-246-2201, TTY 711. When the electricity comes back on, contact the Health Department to let them know that the establishment has re-opened.

Active Managerial Control Awards

Congratulations to the food service operators who were recognized with an Active Managerial Control award over the last three-month period! During their recent inspections, there were no violations cited and it was observed that good active managerial controls were in place. Congratulations to:

- **Daniel Moody**, Reston National Golf Course, 11875 Sunrise Valley Drive, Reston
- **Marhawit (Mimi) Tesfamariam**, Higher Horizon Day Care Center, 5920 Summers Lane, Falls Church
- **Wendell McPherson**, Arbor Terrace of Fairfax, 3925 Downs Drive, Chantilly
- **Fredrico Gutierrez**, California Tortilla, 1470 North Point Village Center, Reston

See pictures and read details about how they are reducing the risk of foodborne illness in their food establishment on the Health Department website www.fairfaxcounty.gov/health/food/awards-programs/active-managerial-control. If you have questions about active managerial control in your food establishment, please speak to your area Environmental Health Specialist.



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contents and washing, rinsing, and sanitizing the inside of the bin, as well as the underside of the door and the door gasket. When in use, cover ice bins and store the scoop in a clean area that is protected from contamination.

Remember, the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) considers ice to be a food. Protect ice from contamination just as you would protect any other ready-to-eat food ingredient. If you have any questions, please contact the Health Department or your area inspector.

Grease Traps: An Important Reminder

Fairfax County’s Wastewater Management Program would like to remind **all food service establishments** to clean and maintain their grease traps often to keep their business running and avoid costly plumbing service calls. County inspectors are currently checking grease traps.

To learn more, please contact the **Industrial Waste Section of Wastewater Management at (703) 550 – 9740, press 1, then enter extension 1406428.**

Info on COVID-19 Vaccines & Mask Updates

On May 14, the universal mask mandate in Virginia was lifted to align with [CDC guidance](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s0514-covid-19-guidance.html). The CDC guidelines state that:

“fully-vaccinated individuals do not have to wear masks in most indoor settings, except on public transit, in health care facilities, inside K-12 schools and in congregate settings.

Businesses retain the ability to require masks in their establishments. Employees who work in certain business sectors—including restaurants, retail, fitness, personal care, and entertainment—must continue to wear masks unless fully vaccinated.”

Get your Vaccine to help fight COVID-19 today. You can make an appointment online at www.vaccines.gov or call 703-324-7404 to make an appointment. Learn more about vaccines at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/covid19.

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