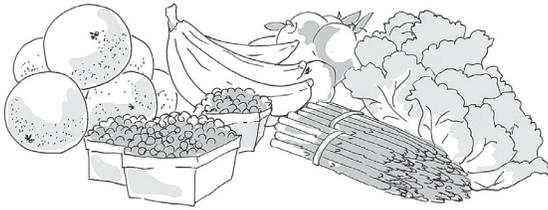


# FOOD TALK



SANITATION TIPS FOR FOOD WORKERS

Summer 2013



## Recipe for a Food Safety Culture!

Food safety experts sometimes talk about the need for a “food safety culture.” What they mean is that the key to safer food lies in getting food workers to commit to food safety so they will improve their behavior. In essence, food safety is about how people do things.

Frank Yiannas, who is in charge of food safety at Walmart, wrote a book on the subject. The book, titled *Food Safety Culture: Creating a Behavior-Based Food Safety Management System*, was written for food safety professionals. But its main message is clear even for non-experts:

“To improve the food safety performance of a retail or foodservice establishment... you must change the way people do things,” he says.

Yiannas believes that making food safer calls for more than the routine of training, testing and inspections. Among the most common causes of foodborne disease, he says, is unsafe behavior, such as improper hand washing, cross-contamination, or undercooking of foods.

**“To improve the food safety performance of a retail or foodservice establishment... you must change the way people do things.”**

You won’t see the term “food safety culture” in the food regulations. The FDA model Food Code doesn’t even mention it. But the model code does state that the “person-in-charge” of an establishment has certain responsibilities, including the responsibility to ensure that all staff follow safe practices when preparing food.

Because a culture of food safety is so important, it needs to include not just the person-in-charge but everyone from the senior executives to the newest worker. And, Yiannas says, it needs to begin with a serious commitment and active support from senior management.

Let’s have a look at how a food safety culture might work in terms of actual behavior in a food establishment. First, everyone would pay

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attention to personal hygiene. They would always be careful to avoid cross contamination of foods. And they would cook and cool foods using safe temperatures.

The recipe for a food safety culture also calls for close attention to foods at the delivery stage.

In a food safety culture, as soon as food products are delivered to an establishment's door, someone will inspect them carefully to be sure the containers are in good condition and ensure that there are no signs of temperature abuse.

A food establishment with a strong food safety culture will detect problems early, so the problems don't get a chance to become more serious and make customers ill.

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## A food establishment with a strong food safety culture will identify and solve problems early.

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The Minnesota Department of Agriculture offers some useful tips for what to do at the receiving stage. For example, if a container is broken open, crushed, torn, or otherwise damaged, the contents may have been exposed to possible contamination. And whoever checks the delivery at the door should look for signs of contamination by rodents, insects or birds.

Canned products with dents on the top or bottom rim, or on side seams should be rejected. If cans are swollen or bulging, or if they are rusted with pitted surfaces, they should either be either thrown away or returned to the supplier.

### Avoid Cross-Contamination at Delivery

The potential for cross-contamination at the delivery stage is high, so whoever inspects the food needs to ensure that containers or cartons filled with raw foods, such as meats and poultry, or fresh produce, are not stacked on top of each other or located in such a way that leaking product from one container can contaminate a different food in another container.

In a strong food safety culture, this level of attention to detail would be consistent throughout the food preparation, and in the serving of the food to customers.

## Reduce Risk in Receiving, Storing

The food that comes to your receiving door and the food you store in your cooler needs to be inspected regularly for signs of spoilage. Here are some danger signs to look for:



### Fresh Poultry

- When stored raw in the cooler for longer than one to two days (three to four for cooked poultry).
- When left unrefrigerated for more than two hours before or after cooking.



### Fresh Meat

- When stored raw in the cooler for longer than three to five days.
- When discolored, slimy, or smelly.
- When left unrefrigerated for more than two hours either before or after cooking.



### Chopped Meat

- Same as above, except when stored raw for longer than one to two days.



### Fresh Fish

- When stored for longer than one to two days in the cooler.
- When dried at the edges, or smelly.



- When unrefrigerated for more than two hours before or after cooking.

### Milk, Eggs and Other Dairy Foods

- When left unrefrigerated for more than two hours
- When stored in the cooler longer than five to seven days.

### Frozen Meats, Poultry, Fish & Casseroles

- When thawed at room temperature.
- When allowed to thaw and be refrozen.
- When served before thoroughly cooked.



### Canned Foods

- If liquid spurts out when the can is opened.
- When a can is corroded, rusty or leaky, swollen on top or bottom, or dented on side seams.
- When the contents have an off-odor, or a foamy or mushy texture.



### Cereals & Flour

- When stored at temperatures above 38 degrees C (100 degrees F) or allowed to freeze and thaw.
- When moldy or infested by insects.

## Food Safety Culture: It's About What You Do with Your Hands

Unless this is your first day on the job, you should know by now that the most important act of personal hygiene for you as a food worker is to wash your hands. And it's a key part of an effective food safety culture.

No one can say the exact number of times you should wash. The usual answer is "Whenever your hands are soiled." But "soiled" does not just mean when your hands look dirty. It also means when they are contaminated with the invisible microorganisms that cause foodborne illness.

Public health officials have made a list of food worker activities that are likely to contaminate your hands. You can use this list as a guide to when you should wash your hands:

- Before starting work at the beginning of the day or after any break.
- After using the toilet.
- After handling raw products—meat, poultry, eggs, seafood, fresh fruits, and vegetables.
- Before you work with cooked or ready to eat foods.
- When you cough or sneeze, whether into a tissue, your handkerchief, or into your hands, and whenever you blow your nose.
- Whenever you have cleaned a table or counter of used tableware, picked up a wiping cloth, scraped food from plates, or come in contact with dirty equipment, work surfaces, or anything else that is soiled.
- After handling garbage or taking trash to the dumpster.
- After making change or handling boxes, crates, packages, or other soiled items.

## What If the Freezer Fails?

Violent summer storms often knock out power, leaving restaurants scrambling for ways to keep frozen or refrigerated foods from spoiling. Here are some tips from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for keeping food safe if the power supply is interrupted.

- A full freezer will stay at freezing temperatures for about two days without power. A half-full freezer will maintain a safe temperature for about a day. If your freezer is not full, group packages together so they protect each other.



• Resist the temptation to keep looking to see if the food is still frozen. Every time you open the freezer door, warm air rushes in.

• If it appears the outage will last for several days, place dry ice around the items to be kept frozen, being careful not to let it touch the food packages directly. Twenty-five pounds of dry ice will hold a 10 cubic-foot full freezer for three to four days.

- Don't touch dry ice with your bare hands or breathe the fumes in an enclosed area.
- Group meat and poultry to one side or on a tray so if they begin to thaw their juices won't get on the other foods. Meat or poultry that still contains ice crystals may be safely refrozen. Once they thaw or are only "cool feeling," it is better to cook them. Cooked items can then be refrozen.
- If you have any doubt about the safety of a thawed food, or if you detect a slightly unusual color or odor, play it safe and throw the product out. You don't want to risk making your customers sick.
- Food in the refrigerator should be safe if the power is out for no more than four hours. Keep the door closed as much as possible. Discard any perishable foods (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and leftovers) that have been above 5 degrees C (41 degrees F) for more than two hours.
- Never taste food to check if it's safe! And don't rely just on appearance or odor to determine if food is safe.
- Always discard items in the refrigerator that have come into contact with raw meat juices.



## Test Yourself on Food Safety

Try this quick quiz to check what you have learned in this issue:

1. One key element of a food safety culture is:
  - a. Learning to speak a new language.
  - b. Knowing how to make yogurt.
  - c. What you do with your hands.
  - d. None of the above.
2. If you are really committed to a food safety culture, you will always wash your hands:
  - a. After handling garbage or taking trash to the dumpster.
  - b. After making change or handling boxes, crates, packages, or other soiled items.
  - c. Before starting work at the beginning of the day or after any break.
  - d. All of the above.
3. Meat or poultry that still contains ice crystals may:
  - a. Be safely refrozen.

- b. Not be cooked and refrozen.
  - c. Need to be discarded.
  - d. None of the above.
4. A full freezer will stay at freezing temperatures without power for:
  - a. About four days.
  - b. About one week.
  - c. About two days.
  - d. None of the above.
5. Twenty-five pounds of dry ice will hold a 10 cubic-foot full freezer for:
  - a. Almost one week.
  - b. Three to four days.
  - c. Up to two weeks.
  - d. None of the above.

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Answers: 1(c), 2(d), 3(a), 4(c), 5(b)

Sources for this issue: *Food Safety Culture*, by Frank Yiannas (2009, Springer), U.S. Department of Agriculture, Minnesota Department of Agriculture.