

Division of Environmental Health

Food Safety & Sanitation Program

State of Alaska > DEC > EH > Food Safety and Sanitation Program > Common Food Service Problems

21 Most Common Food Service Problems

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The following 21 problems are the most common deficiencies found in food service facilities within the State of Alaska. These problems are spotted by the Environmental Health Officers during inspections of the facilities. The operators are informed as to how to correct these deficiencies and a follow-up inspection is done, if necessary.

1. Potentially hazardous foods do not meet temperature requirements.

- **Problem:** Perishable food, which consists in whole or in part of eggs, meat, milk, poultry, fish, shellfish or other ingredients capable of supporting rapid bacterial growth, is found at room temperature.
- **Solution:** Keep all potentially hazardous food at safe temperature: cold foods 41 F or below, hot foods 140 F or above.

2. Potentially hazardous foods are not properly thawed.

- **Problem:** Meat, poultry and seafood thawed at room temperature. This practice is extremely dangerous. The surface of the food rapidly warms to the danger zone. (41 F to 140 F) and after several hours can produce enough germs or toxin to cause illness.
- **Solution:** Plan your menu and thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator. Remember large items such as turkeys may take as long as 72 hours to thaw. In an emergency, frozen potentially hazardous foods may be thawed under running potable water at 70 F or below until thawed; then cooked or refrigerated. If food is thawed in a microwave, it must be immediately transferred to a conventional cooking unit as part of a continuous cooking process.

3. Thermometers are not provided or are not conspicuously located.

- **Problem:** Thermometers are not available or easily located in refrigeration units and at heating units.
- **Solution:** A major safeguard in handling food for the public's consumption is the maintenance of proper temperature. Thermometers must be kept in all refrigerators so that temperatures can be conveniently monitored at all times. For units without built-in thermometers, we recommend that small non-mercury thermometers be taped to the inside of the door, since they are easily lost or broken when placed on racks. Metal stem thermometers must be available for monitoring temperatures of foods in "hot holding". Remember, keep **hot** foods **hot** (140 F or above), and **cold**

Quick Links...

- › [Active Managerial Control - Improving Food Safety](#)
- › [Recalls and Alerts](#)
- › [Contact our Staff](#)
- › [Norovirus Information](#)
- › [Food Code Proposed Changes Summary](#)

Of Interest...

- › [Seafood Processing & Development](#)
- › [Food Establishments](#)
- › [Public Facilities](#)
- › [Training](#)
- › [Consumers](#)

foods **cold** (41 F or below).

4. Food protection is inadequate.

- **Problem:** Food stored in refrigerators and walk-in coolers is not covered or wrapped. Sacks of potatoes and onions, crates of vegetables and fruits, cases of canned goods, and other food items stored on the floor.
- **Solution:** The floor area for such storage cannot be cleaned; dust and debris are swept onto and between these items when the adjoining floor area is cleaned, the dirty bottoms of these food containers contaminate clean surfaces when the containers are lifted onto tables or benches, and the storage area becomes more attractive to the harborage of insect and rodent pests. Install shelving at least 6 inches above the floor. The area beneath the shelving must be accessible for cleaning, or the void sealed with a tight fitting base plate. For items which are too large or bulky for shelf storage, use pallets and keep the area underneath clean. Cover all refrigerated foods. Do not stack food items in the refrigerator.

5. Handling of food is not minimized.

- **Problem:** The use of containers without handles (such as bowls, cups, and glasses) for scooping flour, sugar and other bulk materials from storage bins which may result in contamination of bulk food items from contact with workers' hands.
- **Solution:** Scoops with handles must be provided, as they prevent foodhandlers from running their fingers and hands through the food materials. In many instances, transmission of germs can also be reduced by using forks, knives, tongs, scoops and other utensils that minimize the handling of food.

6. Hygienic practices are not used.

- **Problem:** Eating, smoking or use of tobacco in any form while in food preparation, service, equipment or utensil washing areas. Since the hands of smokers come into contact with the mouth each time a cigarette is taken from the mouth, smoking employees may contaminate the product with which they are working with bacteria from their mouth.
- **Solution:** No smoking or eating should be permitted in the food preparation area at any time. If smoking is permitted in the storeroom, sufficient ashtrays should be provided and individual smoking must wash his/her hands each time he returns to the food preparation area.

7. Food contact surfaces of equipment and utensils are not clean.

- **Problem:** Accumulation of dried food substances on slicers, mixers, sugar bins, meat tenderizers, can opener blades, refrigerator shelves and door handles, and other equipment that normally comes into contact with food products.
- **Solution:** Clean and sanitize meat slicers and cutting boards between uses or different types of food, such as meat and vegetables, to avoid "cross-contamination". Clean all kitchen equipment on a regular schedule.

8. Non-food contact surfaces of equipment and utensils are not clean.

- **Problem:** Unclean counters, shelves, insides and tops of refrigerators, ovens, tables, tops of mixers and exteriors of exhaust hoods. These surfaces must be kept clean so dirt does not fall into food containers or attract insects.

- **Solution:** Utilize a cleaning checklist to insure periodic cleaning of all non-food contact surfaces.

9. Dishwashing facilities are inadequate.

- **Problem:** Manual dishwashing - improper sequence in three compartment sink.
- **Solution:** Wash all utensils in hot water containing detergent, rinse in hot clean water and sanitize in the third compartment by immersing in water containing approved sanitizer for one minute.
- **Problem:** Dishwash machine - improper maintenance of machine, including broken temperature gauges, clogged rinse jets, and heavy lime build-ups.
- **Solution:** Check dishwash machine daily for proper cleaning and maintenance. Keep several spare parts on hand.

10. Sanitation rinse is not used.

Adequate dishwashing is one of the most important procedures in the food service operation in breaking the chain of infection from customer to customer.

- **Problem:** Manual dishwashing - no test kit available to periodically check the concentration of the sanitizing chemical.
- **Solution:** Obtain address of test kit from your Sanitarian.
- **Problem:** Dishwash machines - machines using hot water for final rinse not reaching the required 180 F, or lack of bleach in machines designed to dispense chlorine with final rinse.
- **Solution:** Check the dishwash final rinse daily to insure it reaches the required gauge temperature of 180 F final rinse, or check the chlorine dispenser reservoir daily.

11. Original containers are not used, or container is not properly labeled.

- **Problem:** Foods received in large or bulky containers are transferred to smaller but unlabeled containers. Sometimes the small can of salt or sugar kept handy to the stove gets confused with the rat or roach poison kept in an identical can.
- **Solution:** Unless the food item is easily identifiable and cannot be mistaken for another product, store it in clearly labeled containers. Keep all poisons and other toxic materials sorted in their original container and in a safe place (segregate complete from food storage). Do not store cleaning compounds in the same cabinet as insecticides and rodenticides. Use only smooth, easily cleanable containers for food; empty tin cans do not meet this requirement.

12. Storage of clean equipment and utensils is not appropriate.

- **Problem:** Cups and glasses stored on toweling. Pans stored before thoroughly dry, and in some cases "clean" pots and pans stored on floor.
- **Solution:** Store cups and glasses on rubber matting to allow air circulation and invert dry pots and pans on storage racks.

13. Food- or ice-dispensing utensils are improperly stored.

- **Problem:** Ice cream dipper is stored in milk shake container half full of water. Handle of ice scoop is covered with ice.
- **Solution:** Store ice cream scoop in cold running water, or clean and dry after each

use. Store ice scoop with handle up or in a clean, protected place near the ice machine.

14. Single service articles are not stored properly or do not have proper dispensers.

- **Problem:** No dispenser for single service cups or such articles handled or dispensed in a manner that contaminate surfaces which may come into contact with food or the mouth of the user.
- **Solution:** Use dispensers and insure single service articles are used only once. Store single service articles in covered cartons or containers which protect them from contamination.

15. Cross connections cause back siphonage or backflow.

- **Problem:** Rubber hoses directly attached to kitchen sink or janitor's mop sink. Variations in water pressure can cause a vacuum in the water lines. If hoses are reaching into the sink, dishwasher or mopwater can be drawn back into the public water supply.
- **Solution:** Install vacuum breakers on all spigots with hoses or place vacuum breaker on hose bib.

16. Toilet and handwashing facilities are not proper or adequate.

- **Problem:** Toilet facilities not clean and in good repair; single service towels and soap not provided at handwash sinks.
- **Solution:** Clean and properly maintained toilet facilities generate a proper attitude toward sanitary practices and conditions in the food service establishment. It is extremely important that employees wash their hands after using the toilet facilities and after handling contaminated materials in the kitchen in order to break the chain of infection.

17. Indoor and outdoor storage is not properly maintained.

- **Problem:** Garbage cans are not kept clean, or covered with tight fitting lids; dumpsters are dirty and lids are left open.
- **Solution:** Clean garbage cans after each use and cover when not in continuous use; keep dumpster lids closed and dispose with sufficient frequency to prevent a nuisance.

18. Construction of floors, walls and ceilings does not meet specifications.

- **Problem::** Broken tile or linoleum flooring; dirty and greasy walls and un-cleanable ceilings.
- **Solution:** Maintain floor in food preparation and storage areas to be smooth, nonabsorbent and easily cleanable; keep wall and ceiling clean and in good repair.

19. Lighting is not provided as required and fixtures are not shielded.

- **Problem:** Inadequate lighting on food preparation and dishwashing areas; no shields on kitchen lights.
- **Solution:** Provide at least 50 foot candles of light on all working surfaces and at least 30 foot candles of light to all other surfaces and equipment in food preparation, utensil washing and hand washing areas; shield light fixtures in food preparation and

service areas to protect against broken glass falling into food.

20. Wiping cloths are not clean or use-restricted.

- **Problem:** Wiping cloth on counter, used to wipe spill on floor.
- **Solution:** Wiping cloth or dishrags used for wiping food spills must be used for no other purpose, and should be frequently rinsed in an approved sanitizing solution.

21. Food preparation surface is uncleanable.

- **Problem:** Plywood and other soft woods may not be used for cutting boards, sandwich preparation tables, or other food contact surfaces as they cannot be kept in a sanitary condition. Hard maple, which is the only wood approved for such use, that has cracks or scoring which make the surface unsanitizable.
- **Solution:** Use only hard maple or plastic for cutting boards, sandwich tables, and other food contact surfaces. When maple becomes cracked, discard it. Deep scoring of maple must be removed by refinishing, or the board discarded.