FOOD SAFETY TRAINING FOR PANTRIES

CONNECTICUT foodbank
A PARTNERSHIP TO ALLEVIATE HUNGER

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FOOD SAFETY TRAINING FOR PANTRIES

According to the Center for Disease Control, each year 76 million individuals get sick from foodborne illnesses; 325,000 individuals are hospitalized; 5,000 individuals die.

Why Focus on Food Safety?

- Even though pantries do not prepare meals, care must always be taken in giving food to the public, especially to populations with a heightened susceptibility to food-borne illnesses:
  - Infants, children, elderly, pregnant women
  - Individuals who are undernourished, physically disabled, or have weakened immune systems

- Donated product is different than retail store product:
  - Donated product is often handled by more people in its lifetime than purchased product
  - It is harder to establish that everyone handling donated food has handled it appropriately
  - Donated product is most likely closer to code date than retail store product

- In the event of an illness, organizational liability is reduced only if you can demonstrate that procedures have been followed to maintain the chain of food safety

How Food Becomes Unsafe:

- Biological hazards such as bacteria, viruses, parasites and fungi can’t be seen, tasted, or smelled and can contaminate food (these are called pathogens)

- Chemical hazards such as cleaning products, sanitizers, pest control poisons, etc. can contaminate food

- Physical hazards such as dirt or rust on top of cans, metal shavings, glass fragments, animal droppings, insect casings, etc. can contaminate food

- Pantries are at highest risk for time and temperature abuse of product, which means letting food stay too long in the Temperature Danger Zone:
  - Temperature Danger Zone (41°F - 135°F) is the range in which pathogens grow fastest
  - Meat, poultry, fish, shellfish and dairy products, whether cooked or uncooked, should not be left in the Temperature Danger Zone for more than 1 hour
  - Any cooked vegetable, starch or grain products including rice, pasta and potatoes should not be left in the Temperature Danger Zone for more than 1 hour
  - Frozen product should not remain in the Temperature Danger Zone for more than 4 hours over the course of the product’s lifetime
PROPER STORAGE ENVIRONMENT:

- **ACCESS TO STORAGE SHOULD BE LIMITED TO AUTHORIZED STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS WHO HAVE AN AWARENESS OF FOOD SAFETY ISSUES**

- **DRY STORAGE AREAS SHOULD BE CLEAN, DRY, AND PEST-FREE:**
  - Clean storage areas regularly
  - Storage areas should be well ventilated
  - Keep the dry-storage environment between 50° and 70° F with humidity less than 60%
  - If there is a “musty” smell or there is condensation on walls, install a dehumidifier
  - Keep records of pest inspections and document what steps were taken if evidence of pests was discovered:
    - If you do not have a contract with a pest control service, create your own log that tracks inspections & treatments
    - Ensure that all access points for pests and vermin are sealed
    - Store cereals, grains, sugar & flour in airtight containers to prevent infestations

- **FOOD SHOULD BE STORED AT LEAST 6 INCHES ABOVE THE GROUND AND (IDEALLY) 2 INCHES AWAY FROM THE WALLS:**
  - Prevents product from contamination should there be minor flooding
  - Reduces pest access
  - Allows for easier cleaning
  - To maximize storage, put non-food items on the floor or lowest shelf

- **SEPARATE DRY-STORAGE PRODUCT FROM CHEMICALS:**
  - Store cleaning products and other chemicals in a separate room from food storage
  - If this is not possible, store such items on a separate set of shelves
  - Do not ever store cleaning products or chemicals above food items

- **AVOID STORING PRODUCT:**
  - Beneath water or sewer lines
  - Near heat sources such as ovens, forced air vents, or furnaces
  - Near windows that receive direct sunlight

- **MAINTAIN COLD-STORAGE UNITS APPROPRIATELY:**
  - Ensure that refrigerators are holding temperatures between 33° F and 40° F
    - Below 32° F and product may freeze
    - Colonies of bacteria that cause foodborne illness can double in 20 minutes if food is stored in the Temperature Danger Zone (41° F - 135° F)
  - Ensure that freezers are holding temperatures between -10° F and 0° F
    - Food stored below 30° F may appear to be frozen, but certain yeasts and bacteria can continue to grow at 15° F
  - Record cold storage temperatures at least once a week
  - Clean and/or defrost all units at least quarterly
EVALUATING PRODUCT FITNESS – CODE DATES:

- **Dates are printed on many food items, but product dating is NOT REQUIRED by federal regulations except on infant formula and baby foods.**

- **Closed dates**, packing numbers, or Julian codes appear as a series of letters and/or numbers and are created by the manufacturer:
  - Usually appear on shelf-stable products such as cans or boxes
  - Refer to the date or time of manufacture, not product expiration
  - Enable manufacturers to rotate their stock
  - Enable manufacturers to locate product in the event of a recall

- **Calendar dates** help stores determine how long to display product for sale:
  - Relate to the peak quality of food, not product safety
  - Found primarily on perishable foods, such as dairy, eggs, meat and poultry

- **Three common types of code dates**:
  - “Best if used by” recommended for best flavor or quality; not a purchase or safety date
  - “Sell-by” date tells the store how long to display the product for sale; receive the product before this date expires
  - “Use by” the last date recommended for use of the product while at peak quality; the manufacturer of the product has determined this date

- **Shelf-stable or frozen product** that is past code date is generally safe to distribute; however, product color, taste, or nutritional content may be affected

- **Refrigerated items** should be distributed on or shortly after code date:
  - Eggs can be distributed 3-4 weeks after the sell-by date
  - Yogurt can be distributed up to 7 days past the sell-by date

- **Based on product type, available code dates**, or when the product was received, you should **determine a safe last date for distribution**:
  - It is assumed that most pantry consumers will use the product within a few days
  - Baby food and infant formula cannot be distributed past the use-by date
  - Canned goods can be distributed at least a year past code date
    - Low-acid canned goods can be distributed longer past code date than high-acid canned goods (e.g., potatoes vs. tomatoes)
  - Boxed pastas, rice, and beans can be distributed at least a year past code date
  - Non-frozen perishables must be distributed within or soon after code date
  - Retail meats frozen on or before the sell-by date should be distributed within 6 months
EVALUATING PRODUCT FITNESS – CANS:

THROW OUT CANS WITH:

- Dent in the top or bottom rim
- Dents on the side seam or an incorrectly welded seam
- Deep dents that do not allow stacking (except for dry goods such as ground coffee, powdered drink mixes)
- Swollen or bulging end, or an end that gives when pushed (again, except for dry goods such as ground coffee, etc)
- Rust or soil that does not wipe off
- Dents around the score lines under a pull-tab; openings
- Leaks
- Dirt under a pull-tab top
- Mold or watermarks
- Evidence of exposure to temperature extremes (such as scorch marks or frost)
- Signs of insects, including egg cases, body parts, webs, and droppings
- Signs of rodents, including gnaw marks, droppings, or urine
- Dating past the acceptable safe date
- Missing labels or labels you cannot read

WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!
EVALUATING PRODUCT FITNESS – BOXES & BAGS:

**THROW OUT BOXES THAT HAVE:**

- Open tops or bottoms
- Contaminants inside the boxes
- Torn, leaking or contaminated inner bags
- Inner bags with open seams or holes
- Mold or watermarks
- Signs of insects, including bugs in seams, holes, egg cases, webs, body parts, or droppings
- Signs of rodents, including gnaw marks, droppings, or urine
- Dating past the acceptable safe date
- Missing labels or labels you cannot read

**THROW OUT BAGS OR SACKS WITH:**

- Rips, tears, punctures or holes
- Mold or watermarks
- Incomplete or incorrectly formed seals or seams
- Signs of insects, including bugs in seams, holes, egg cases, webs, body parts, or droppings
- Signs of rodents, including gnaw marks, droppings, or urine
- Dating past the acceptable safe date
- Missing labels or labels you cannot read

When in doubt, throw it out!
EVALUATING PRODUCT FITNESS – BOTTLES, JARS & POUCHES:

THROW OUT GLASS OR PLASTIC BOTTLES OR JARS WITH:

- Loose or broken caps
- Leaking screw tops
- Broken tamper-evident seals
- Other signs the cap was opened
- Foreign objects inside the container
- Unusual product separation
- Mold inside the container
- Dirt or other particles under the rim
- Signs of insects
- Signs of rodents, including gnaw marks, droppings or urine
- Signs the container was wet
- Cracks or chips
- Home-jarred foods
- Dates past the acceptable safe date
- Missing labels or labels you cannot read

THROW OUT POUCHES WITH:

- Leaks, open seals, holes or punctures
- Cuts, cracks, or scratches deep enough to leak
- Mold or signs the package was wet
- Incomplete or incorrectly formed seals
- Folds or wrinkles (caused by one side longer than another
- Foreign objects trapped inside pouch or interrupting the seal or seam
- Bulges on the seams
- Inflation
- Signs of insects or rodents
- Dating past the acceptable safe date
- Missing labels or labels you cannot read

WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!
EVALUATING PRODUCT FITNESS – FROZEN MEATS:

THROW OUT MEATS THAT HAVE:
- A strong odor of spoilage
- Blood pooled on the underside of packaging
- Punctured or torn packaging
- A green tinge to the meat
- A sell-by date past 6 months

WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!

MEATS ARE GENERALLY SAFE EVEN IF THEY HAVE:
- A darker red or even brown color
  This is due to oxygenation of blood
- “Puffy packaging”
  Due to modified atmosphere packaging, where nitrogen or CO₂ is injected into the interior to prevent oxygenation and maintain the color of the meat
- Ice crystals are a sign that meat has partially thawed and refrozen; generally meat is still safe to consume

RECEIVING PRODUCT:

- Evaluate the source:
  - If you have consistently received marginal product from a source, bring this to their attention and explain your focus on food safety
  - If you have any concern that the source has not followed key food safety standards, ask for details about their operational practices
  - It is advisable that you do not accept
    - Prepared foods from restaurants or caterers
    - Prepared foods from organizations or individuals cooking in unlicensed kitchens
    - Meat that has not been processed in a USDA-certified facility (e.g. venison from a hunter)

- Evaluate product appropriateness and fitness:
  - Product should be appropriate for what you can safely store
    - If you don’t have adequate freezer space, don’t receive frozen product
    - If you don’t have adequate refrigerator space, don’t receive refrigerated product
    - If product can not fit in your pantry area, consider not taking as much
  - Do not accept product that is currently or will soon be unfit for consumption
  - If such product is received, discard it immediately
RECEIVING PRODUCT (CONTINUED):

- **KEEP RECEIPTS OF PRODUCT RECEIVED:**
  - Indicate source, date received, itemize product & quantity
  - Receipts can be used to track down product recalls
  - Receipts can be used to thank donors

- **LABEL PRODUCT WITH A “DISTRIBUTE BY” OR “RECEIVED ON” DATE**
  - If there is a code date on the product:
    - Determine the last safe date to distribute the product
    - (It is assumed that most pantry consumers will use the product within a few days)
    - Label the product with the “Dist by” date
  - If you purchased the product and there is no code date, you can estimate the “Dist by” date
  - If the product is donated and there is no code date, label it with a “Received on” date
  - Distribute product with a “Rcvd” date before all others, as there is no way to determine how old it may be.

TRANSPORTING PRODUCT:

- **BRING PRODUCT BACK TO YOUR STORAGE LOCATION IN THE SHORTEST TIME POSSIBLE**

- **ENSURE THAT THE VEHICLE IS CLEAN; DO NOT STORE CHEMICALS IN THE SAME AREA WHERE PRODUCT IS TO BE PLACED**

- **REFRIGERATED OR FROZEN PRODUCT SHOULD BE WRAPPED IN INSULATED BLANKETS OR PUT IN COOLERS DURING TRANSPORT**

MAINTAINING INVENTORY – GENERAL RULES:

- **OLDER PRODUCT SHOULD BE MORE ACCESSIBLE THAN NEWER PRODUCT**
  - Move older product to the front of shelves
  - If you have shelving dedicated to the next distribution, put older product from your stockroom on these shelves

- **DO NOT STOCKPILE LARGE QUANTITIES OF FOOD FOR AN EMERGENCY**

- **DO NOT OPEN PACKAGES AND SUBDIVIDE PRODUCT INTO SMALLER PORTIONS FOR DISTRIBUTION**

- **GO THROUGH YOUR ENTIRE INVENTORY QUARTERLY AND THROW OUT PRODUCT PAST THE “DISTRIBUTE BY” DATE OR SIGNIFICANTLY PAST THE “RECEIVED ON” DATE**
MAINTAINING INVENTORY – COLD STORAGE:

- Do not overfill your cold storage units or place product too close to vents; cold air must be able to circulate throughout the entire unit

- Go through all your refrigerated inventory weekly and throw out product past the “distribute by” date or significantly past the “received on” date

- Go through all your frozen inventory quarterly and throw out product past the “distribute by” date or significantly past the “received on” date

- To identify loss of power in the freezer, place a penny on top of water frozen in a bottle; if the penny sinks over time, the freezer has stopped working at some point
  - If you cannot determine how long meat has remained unfrozen, discard it immediately
  - Meat that has been in a full but non-functional freezer for less than four hours can be refrozen and distributed

MAINTAINING INVENTORY – CHECKING FOR RECALLS:

- Check the USDA and FDA websites regularly for product recalls
  - The USDA reports on meat, dairy and egg related recalls
  - The FDA reports on all other food-related recalls

- Local and national news broadcasts about product recalls should lead you to find out details from the USDA or FDA websites

- Check to see if any recalled product is or was in your inventory:
  - First review product receipts
  - Visually inspect your inventory for affected product

- If you have affected product in inventory, follow disposal and reporting guidelines associated with the recall

- If you know that affected product has been distributed, contact pantry recipients
  - Note: This requires keeping contact information for pantry recipients

DISTRIBUTING PRODUCT:

- Give out older product before newer product

- Do not distribute frozen food from a table unless it is insulated

- Do not thaw frozen meat to give to consumers as they may refreeze it at home; however, it is safe to refreeze bread

- Educate attendees about the safety of food past code date, when to consume food when time is a factor, and how to store food responsibly