

# FoodBytes



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## Don't leave ice out in the cold

Nearly all food establishments use ice, either from their own ice machines, or operators may use bagged ice. But ice is often taken for granted and its safety is neglected.

Ice is a "food" because consumers eat it; so it deserves proper care. Even though ice is not potentially hazardous, ice machines can harbor bacteria, molds, and other contaminants that can make their way to customers. Here are some tips for keeping ice safe for food establishment operators.

### ◆ Use only ice from a potable source

Ice can only be used from a source that is inspected and approved for human consumption. This means bagged ice, or ice made from water from a public utility. If the water is from a private well, the water *must* be tested regularly to assure that it is safe. Operators should be able to provide inspectors with the test results.

### ◆ Keep ice machines and ice bins clean

Many people mistake-

only believe that since ice is made from "clean" water, then no action is ever needed to maintain the ice machine or bin. Every ice



machine will accumulate mineral buildup, which can harbor bacteria. Molds can also grow in the moist environment. Before cleaning, dispose of any ice remaining in the machine. An appropriate bleach solution (as per Sec. 257) and a scrub brush should be used to clean the ice machine and then the unit must be allowed to air dry.

Any establishment using an ice bin with a cold plate (typically found in bars) must remove the plate and thoroughly clean and

sanitize the bin frequently. (Note that this design is not allowed for new construction, but rather the cold plate should be integrated into the storage bin.)

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## Treat ice bags as food containers

Food workers should always wipe the outside of ice bags prior to opening and dumping them into ice bins. Workers must never attempt to break up ice by smashing the ice bag on the ground or floor. The ice pieces will puncture the bag allowing the ice to become contaminated.

Inspect the chutes of ice dispensing machines for cleanliness. Chutes will become soiled with mineral deposits and mold, and should be part of the establishment's regular cleaning schedule.

# Standardization key to consistency

The Food Protection program at ISDH has taken another step toward the goal of consistent application of the food code during food establishment inspections with the roll-out of its “Standardization” program for local health departments.

“The new Standardization Program we are now offering is impor-

The new Standardization Program is important because it adds a much higher degree of uniformity and consistency for those inspectors who participate.

tant because it adds a much higher degree of uniformity and consistency for those inspectors who participate,” said Scott Gilliam, Food Program Manager.

“Anyone who has ever been part of the old Standardization Program will attest to the benefits of having been part of it. The new program is even better, and we encourage people to consider this process for improving their inspection skills.”

The new “Standardization” program, based upon the current food code and the FDA model, is being introduced with eight one-day presentations around the state. The five-hour program explains the use of the standardization manual and how the annexes are used. Local health departments received details by mail in April.

All “standardizations” under the previous code were terminated when the present code took effect in April 2000.

Selected inspectors of larger health departments may be given the opportunity to perform standardization procedures with members of their staffs once they have

been standardized themselves.

Local health department inspectors who did not register for one of the training programs may still do so by contacting ISDH to attend one of the remaining sessions. The inspection methods under the standardization program utilize the latest thinking in current inspection techniques that should be followed by all inspectors, whether standardized or not.

These ISDH Food Protection staffers have been certified by members of FDA’s Office of Regulatory Affairs and are now approved to standardize local health department staffs: Brad Beard, Lee Bray, Dan Miller, Ed Norris, and Margaret Voyles.



## Sampling initiative results encouraging

Listeria monocytogenes, a bacterium responsible for thousands of cases of illness and deaths in the country yearly, has been on the increase. It survives in colder temperatures better than most pathogens in food, and has been found in hot dogs and deli meats.

To find out the prevalence of Listeria in deli meats sold in Indiana, ISDH began an sampling initiative last year to test for L.

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monocytogenes and other pathogens.

Of 90 samples collected, 6 exceeded the guideline for L. monocytogenes, and one showed the presence of Staphylococcus aureus.

22 samples (24%) showed high aerobic plate counts (APC) which may be blamed on temperature abuse or mishandling. Someone with a compromised immune system could become ill.

## If you can only get one, get this one

If your library budget only allows you to purchase one book on food safety, which book should you buy?

The recommendation of the food protection staff would be to purchase the latest edition of the FDA Model Food Code. Not only is it the foundation of the Indiana Food Code, the FDA book contains additional information including sections explaining the public health reasons behind each code section.

# How hot is hot enough for hot holding?

The current food code requires hot holding for potentially hazardous foods at 140° F. But can such foods be safely held at a lower temperature?

That question was debated at the recent Conference for Food Protection.

Recent data reported to FDA from New York and Washington states indicates that inadequate hot holding was suspected or confirmed as leading contributing factors for foodborne illness in these states.

*Clostridium perfringens* has been implicated in cases of illness when food was not held at adequate temperatures. The New York data confirms *C. perfringens* and *Bacillus cereus* as organisms of concern for hot held food. Inadequate hot holding was associated with 50% of cases attributed to both these organisms. Data shows also that *Salmonella* and *Staphy-*

*lococcus aureus* to be causative agents, but the connection to hot holding was less clear.

*C. perfringens* has been reported to grow at 126° F. However, the lag phase duration reported was several hours. Anaerobic conditions were required for growth.

How consistent is hot holding at a typical food establishment? A recent FDA survey of food establishments found that the average difference between the surface temperature and internal temperature of hot held foods was over 30° F.

Last fall, the FDA asked the National Advisory Committee on Microbiological Criteria for Foods (NACMCF) to provide a recommendation concerning the hot holding requirement. NACMCF concluded that “a product temperature of 130° F. will control the growth of pathogens during hot holding with a margin

of safety. If 130° F. is used as the minimum holding temperature, then it is essential to demonstrate that 130° F. is the minimum temperature in the coldest part of the food at all times to account for such things as evaporative cooling, equipment capability, and food matrix dynamics.”

Without sufficient proof of minimum holding temperatures, NACMCF says the margin of safety should be increased through the use of both time and temperature control.

The committee concluded that a minimum temperature of 135° F. for up to 8 hours, or a minimum temperature of 140° F. indefinitely would be adequate for food safety.

The Conference for Food Protection is considering a recommendation of 135° F. for hot holding of potentially hazardous foods.

## Don't leave ice out in the cold (continued)

(Continued from page 1)

### ◆ Ice buckets: forgotten food containers

Many food workers carry ice from the ice machine to places like the ice bins of soft drink machines. The ice is transported by way of the “ice bucket”. This container should be inspected for cleanliness. Only a clean, sanitized container should be used for ice. A container



that has been used for anything else should never be used to hold ice, especially if the bucket once held any toxic substances.

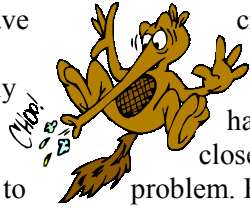
Ice buckets are exposed to constant handling, often stored on floors, and scraped against the tops of ice bins when being emptied. Remember the

plastic material in the bucket is the same color all the way through, so dark marks indicate the bucket is not clean. Ice buckets should be inspected as food contact surfaces.

All beverage machine ice storage containers should be covered when not being filled. Inspect an uncovered ice container the same way you would an uncovered food container.

# Food Allergens: nothing to sneeze at

Food allergens have been a problem in the food industry for many years. Millions of consumers have mild to severe sensitivities to a variety of food products. In the last few years, there have been hundreds of food recalls due to undeclared allergenic ingredients, such as peanuts, dairy, or soy products. The evidence shows that over 90% of all allergenic food reactions in humans are from the following eight (8) types of food:



peanuts, soybeans, milk, eggs, fish, crustacea, tree nuts, and wheat.

Children are especially susceptible to these allergenic ingredients, and many adults must go through life attempting to deal with this problem. There is no cure for food allergies, and although many children do outgrow them, many don't.

It is because of the in-

creased incidence of reported problems that FDA has begun taking a closer look at the problem. FDA is conducting a major allergen initiative this year that will involve the assessment of several different types of manufacturing facilities across the country. The goal is to gather information to help determine the level of voluntary compliance within the manufacturing industry and whether further guidance and/or requirements are needed. The ISDH Wholesale Food Section will be conducting a similar initiative this year in other Indiana facilities not selected by FDA.

It is known that there are problems with incidental cross contact with allergenic ingredients at the manufacturing level. It is also felt that there are most likely problems at the retail level, since many of the retail

food establishments are doing extensive food handling with a wide variety of products. It is important for inspectors to identify these areas with the management of a food establishment to minimize as many allergenic problems as possible. There has not been any official training provided to help us learn how to identify these problems, but ISDH is seeking this and will hopefully be able to offer training through its field representatives.

During this period, inspectors should feel free to bring up the issue during inspection interviews, and determine if food establishments are aware of the problem and what actions have been implemented to control cross contact occurrences between allergenic and non-allergenic food ingredients. Please free to contact the Retail Food Division with any questions or comments.

*Scott Gilliam*

Bad things  
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at full capacity.

◆ **If the water supply or sewage disposal systems fail, businesses must close.**

Food businesses must have hot and cold running water and proper sewage disposal to operate. Without water, there is no way for employees to wash hands, or to clean and sanitize equipment and utensils. These are "critical" areas for any establishment.

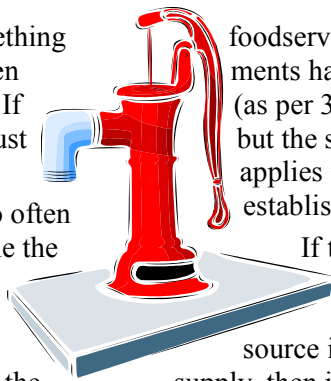
Note that Sec. 429 states establishments must close *and* notify the regulatory authority in the event of an imminent health hazard like fire, flood, or power outage. And regardless of whether closed voluntarily or by health department order, they must have health department approval to reopen.

## Safe water a must for temps and mobiles

Water is something the public too often takes for granted. If it looks safe, it must be safe. Right?

Inspectors too often forget to determine the water source for temporary vendors because they are used to taking the water safety for granted with regular establishments.

Not only must regular



foodservice establishments have safe water (as per 327 IAC 8-2), but the same criteria applies to temporary establishments.

If the establishment or vendor's water source is a municipal supply, then inspectors may assume that the water is safe. But if the source is a private well, then all of the

provisions of law concerning water quality standards will apply.

This includes sampling by the operator to show proof the water is potable. (See Sections 291 and 295 of the Food Code.)

The operator should provide proof that bacteria sampling is done quarterly and nitrate sampling is done yearly.

**Focus  
first on  
food flow**

Whether it's doing a plan review for a new food establishment, or conducting a routine inspection, one of the very first actions an inspector should take is to determine what foods are being served.

The menu is key to determining if the facility has the equipment to handle and store all foods safely. Inspectors can also determine if the operators have appropriate food safety plans.

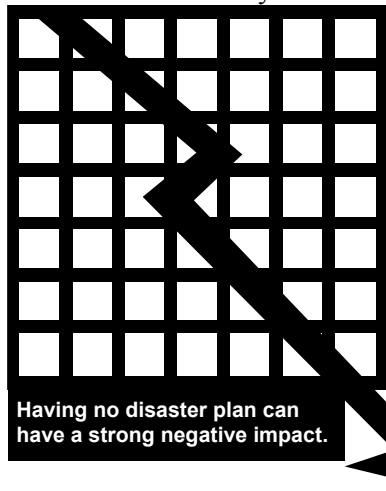
In a grocery store, check out the deli case first for the "menu."

## When bad things happen to good places

Food establishment operators and managers must be optimists. Why else would so few have a workable plan that can be implemented when a disaster strikes?

It doesn't take a major catastrophe like a fire to cause problems for a food business. Power failures and equipment malfunctions have the potential for significant negative impact.

But having a plan, and training employees in implementing that plan, can save businesses money.



The most common problem facing food establishments (especially temporaries) is the possibility of the loss of electrical power. This can mean no power to coolers, freezers, or hot holding equipment. It will also mean that equipment like dish machines will not run (and cash registers!). Prudent operators will have employees trained in a contingency plan for such emergencies. Remember the primary goal is to protect the food.

◆ **When power fails, leave cooler and freezer doors closed.**

Coolers and freezers can keep food safely for as long as 24 hours if no one opens the doors. For an extended outage, one can use blocks or bags of ice for cooling. However, avoid dry ice as it is actually too cold for coolers. Dry ice must be handled with gloves and used only in vented areas.

Some frozen "blue ice" can help.

Another frequent problem is a cooler or freezer breakdown. Remind operators that they should check thermometers in coolers and freezers at the beginning of each day to determine if units are operating properly.

◆ **Have space available in coolers or back-up units to transfer food products when needed.**

Establishments can use portable coolers with ice packs for a short time to keep food cold. Frozen food is still safe if kept below freezing, but storage time may be shortened.

When power returns, operators should then check temperatures of potentially hazardous foods. To be safe, any food found in the danger zone should be discarded because it still may take awhile for coolers and freezers to resume working

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## FDA training offers insights on temporaries

The more than sixty attendees at the first Indiana workshop on Temporary Food Events, went away with new methods to handle such activities in their own health departments.

Ray Niles, (pictured near right) and John Powell, (far right) Food Specialists with FDA, and Larry Little of the Tulsa (Oklahoma) Health Dept., presented insights on work-



ing with event coordinators, conducting plan reviews and menu evaluations, and performing temporary food establishment inspections.

Both Niles and Powell



stressed the importance of obtaining necessary information from organizers and vendors ahead of time to allow inspectors to prepare for the inspections.

## "Ask Scott"

**Q. I recently found a store that had packaged raw meats on display in a cooler. I noticed that a newer label had been placed over an existing label. Isn't this a violation?**

A. Yes, this is a violation as the meat has been "misbranded". While the store can set an expiration date it feels is appropriate, it cannot add another label without first "re-inspecting" and "re-evaluating" the product for wholesomeness. It could then be rewrapped and a new label applied. Misbranding should be marked under Section 117.

Section 182 might also apply.

**Q. Can a food establishment make its own ice, bag it, and sell it to the public?**

A. It's okay as long as certain criteria are met. Making ice is no different from making any other "food" for sale to the public. The bag should be labeled as per Sec. 180 of the code. If the store is not on a public utility, then it

is imperative that the water be sampled as required by law and proof provided to you that the water used for the ice is safe. Be sure that the bags used are approved for food contact. Of course, the ice machine should be cleaned and sanitized on a regular schedule. Don't forget to inspect any filters in water supply lines.

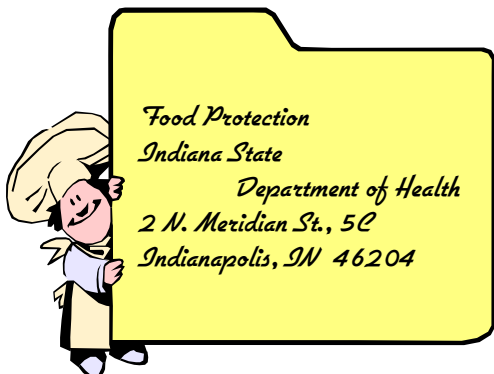
Share the knowledge gained at training seminars, and from working with your ISDH field representative with co-workers. It is important that all local health department inspectors conduct inspections using the same criteria. Be consistent!



## Tip of the month

All inspectors should know how accurate their thermometers are. Make it part of your regular routine to check thermometers for accuracy. If you use a thermocouple, check it too. If the reading is off, determine how much, then allow for the error when checking temperatures.

Send your questions to Scott Gilliam at <food@isdh.state.in.us>, or use the address on page 2.



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