FOOD SAFETY TRAINING FOR PANTRIES

CONNECTICUT foodbank
A PARTNERSHIP TO ALLEVIATE HUNGER

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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:**

- Dented or pinched 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 cannot 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 “Recvd” 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.
RESOURCES:

USDA FACT SHEETS
- Top 10 Reasons to Handle Food Safely
- Food Product Dating
- Color of Meat and Poultry
- Refrigeration and Food Safety
- Freezing and Food Safety
- Safe Defrosting Methods
- How Temperatures Affect Food
- The Temperature Danger Zone

- USDA Recalls
- FDA Recalls

- Other Resources
  - Howcast: How to Understand Food Expiration Dates at the Grocery Store
  - The Food Keeper: A Consumer Guide to Food Quality and Safe Handling
  - The Food Keeper: Get Information About a Specific Product
  - The Food Marketing Institute (FMI): Food Safety Center
  - The Greater Boston Food Bank: Keeping Food Safe
  - ServSafe: Food Safety Training and Certification