Date Marking

**Why**

Date marking is a means controlling for bacterial contamination and assuring that food is discarded before bacteria can cause foodborne illness.

**What**

According to the United States Food and Drug Administration, foods that should be date marked include those that are:

- Temperature Controlled for Safety (TCS)
- Ready-to-eat (RTE)
- Refrigerated
- Held more than 24 hours

Some foods that **DO NOT** need to be date marked include:

- Air cooled hard boiled eggs with the shell intact
- Shell eggs that are not hard-boiled, but has been pasteurized to destroy all viable salmonellae
- Food in a hermetically sealed container commercially processed to achieve and maintain commercial sterility under non-refrigerated storage and distribution
- A food that is designated as a non-TCS food because of its pH or water activity value

**When**

Ready-to-eat and potentially hazardous foods held for more than 24 hours should be date marked at the time of preparation to indicate the date by when the food should be consumed. This food shall be discarded if not sold or served within seven days.

You can choose any marking method that suits the needs of your establishment, as long as it is understandable, effective, consistently used by employees. It’s recommended you provide a written policy for employees to follow.

Use the chart on the following page for more detailed date marking instruction.

**Additional Resources**

For a list of foods that are considered TCS and/or ready-to-eat:

http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/food/fs/datemark.html

For more background information on the process of date marking:

Below is an easy-to-follow chart that describes what foods to date mark and when to do so according to the Iowa Department of Inspection and Appeals.

Potentially hazardous ready-to-eat (RTE) foods prepared in your food establishment **OR** commercially prepared in a Food Processing Plant and opened at your food establishment

- Going to be used within 24 hours
  - No dating of product required

- Food is put in freezer
  - RTE food **MUST** be labeled to indicate the number of days it is kept at refrigeration before it is put into the freezer*

- Going to be held in refrigeration at 41°F or below for more than 24 hours
  - RTE food is placed under refrigeration at 41°F or below. RTE food shall be labeled to indicate that the food shall be consumed, sold or discarded within 7 days

- RTE food removed from freezer
  - RTE food consumed or sold within 7 days or discarded

- If RTE food is unlabeled it must be used within 24 hours

- Thawed and is to be used in 24 hours, no date marking is required

- If RTE Food is to be held for more than 24 hours under refrigeration at 41°F or below, it must be labeled to indicate 7 days minus the time held at refrigeration before freezing to indicate when the RTE Food is

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