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FIFO helps improve the shelf life and safety of raw materials and helps to ensure that raw materials with the earliest ‘use by’ date are used first. Generally these dates will coincide with the earliest date received.

Developing Food Storage Policies

Proper storage of raw materials, supplies and finished products helps protect against contamination. To ensure your finished products are safe, store all ingredients as well as the finished products in the right place, at the right temperature and for the right amount of time.

Here are a few key points you should consider when developing your own food storage policies:

• Label and date all incoming materials using the First in/First out (FIFO) system for storage and usage policies;
• Place received items that require refrigeration or freezing immediately into coolers or freezers to prevent the growth of bacteria and/or thawing;
• Set the maximum time allowed for moving product from the receiving area to the appropriate storage areas;
• Store food elevated off the floor on approved shelving or racks;
• Ensure dry storage is in a cool, dry area away from direct light;
• Keep dry storage temperatures below 21°C (70°F);
• Maintain freezer temperature at minus 18°C (0°F) or less;
• Maintain temperatures of refrigerators or coolers between 4°C (39°F) and 1°C (34°F);
• Load refrigerators or freezers so as not to restrict airflow;
• Store all opened bulk food packages in approved containers with tight fitting lids, with a contents and date label, showing date stored and other important information such as lot codes;
• Do not reuse chemical containers or single service containers;
• Cover all ingredients, packaging and finished products to avoid contamination from above;
• Identify, segregate and maintain control of allergen containing products.

FOOD SAFETY SENTINEL

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WHAT IS DURABLE LIFE?

‘Durable Life’ is the period of time that a food product will retain its wholesomeness, good taste and nutritional value when stored properly. It is not a guarantee of food safety. Durable life begins on the day a product is packaged for retail sale and is generally expressed in number of days. A ‘best before’ date is another way of expressing durable life. It states the date up until the unopened product will retain its durable life. It should be shown on the product along with proper storage instructions.

A ‘packaged on’ date is placed on products when they are packaged at the retail store and must be shown with durable life information.

A ‘durable life’ date is required on pre-packaged foods with a durable life of 90 days or less, with the following exceptions:
- Pre-packaged fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Pre-packaged individual portions of food served by restaurants, airlines, etc. with meals or snacks.
- Pre-packaged individual servings of food prepared by a commissary and sold in automatic vending machines or mobile canteens; and
- Pre-packaged donuts.

Storage Tips

Cold Storage
- Keeping a temperature log for a storage unit will identify when the unit is not functioning properly and if foods have been in the danger zone.
- Label all items or pallets with the product name and the date that they were placed in storage. Use labels that will not fall off at cold temperatures.
- Keep similar items together. For example, store all meat together in one section, vegetables in another and liquids in another.
- Keeping coolers and freezers organized helps save time and energy by allowing quicker access to the food. Remember that the longer the cooler or freezer door is open, the more likely the temperature will change to unacceptable limits.
- Store partially-used ingredients in clearly labelled containers so that food can be identified. For traceability purposes, if the product is transferred from the original packaging, make sure you record the lot number.
- Inspect coolers regularly and remove products that are spoiled or have passed the suggested storage time.

Dry Storage

Dry foods, canned goods and high acid items generally have a low risk of bacterial growth, but even dried foods have a limited shelf life. To ensure the safety of your dry products, you should consider the following:
- Dry-storage rooms should be cool, dry, clean, brightly lit and well ventilated.
- Store food elevated off the floor in original packages or containers that are not easily damaged and that minimize access by pests. Place racks far enough from the wall to allow for cleaning and inspection.
- Humidity can affect the safety and quality of food products. A high humidity level can allow mould to develop while a low humidity level can lead to loss of flavour and texture. Humidity can be controlled through airflow.
- Never use food from cans or jars that are damaged, bloated or overflowing. These may indicate microbial growth.
- Some processing materials (e.g., nitrite) can become toxic when used improperly. They should be securely stored and separated from spice, seasoning and other ingredients.
- Try to maintain your stock at a reasonable volume to avoid excessive age of raw products and insect infestation (particularly in spices).
- Maintain pallets used for storage in a clean condition and in good repair. When wooden pallets are washed, make sure they are completely dry before use.
- If possible, store packaging materials away from raw materials and final product.

WHAT IS FIFO?

FIFO is a food rotation method that stands for First In/First Out (FIFO). Food rotation is an important part of a food safety system. The FIFO food rotation method helps ensure the safety of ingredients and final products, and reduces waste due to spoiled food.

The main steps in the FIFO process are:
1. Label incoming product with the date received or the ‘use by’ date. Stickers attached to the bottom layer of material will help ensure the pallet remains labelled even while the product is being used. Each label should include date received and, where applicable, the ‘best before’ date.
2. Store incoming materials and finished products to ensure older or ‘first in’ stock is used or shipped first.
3. Train all production, shipping and receiving staff to be aware of the in-plant FIFO procedures and their purposes.

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THAWING FROZEN PRODUCT SAFELY

Thawing frozen food is an important step because, if done improperly, harmful bacteria can grow, presenting hazard to the finished product. Here are a few tips for thawing frozen materials safely:
- Ideally, frozen food should be thawed in a refrigerator or cooler.
- To improve air circulation and prevent the product from becoming insulated by the packaging material, remove all packaging before thawing the food.

Allergen Storage
- Store allergen-containing ingredients in a separate section of your storage area away from other ingredients to prevent cross-contamination.
- If allergen dedicated storage area is not possible because of space constraints, store allergens at the bottom of your storage rack.
- If multiple allergens are identified in the facility, only similar allergenic ingredients should be stored above similar allergenic ingredients.
- Another way to prevent allergen cross-contamination during storage is to clearly identify raw materials to indicate they contain allergens (e.g., color-coded containers, allergen stickies, tags and labelled racks).

Chemical Storage
- Cleaning substances, pesticides, paints, solvents, lubricants or other chemicals should be segregated from food items and stored in a room with limited employee access.
- Chemical storage areas should be clean, dry, brightly lit and adequately ventilated.
- All chemicals should be stored in appropriate containers that close tightly and are correctly labelled.

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