

SUMMERTIME FOOD SAFETY©

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For the clubs in the northern climes, now is the time when all members, guests and children are out in full force. This is also the time when food spoilage by bacterial growth can also be most dangerous!

What are you doing to ensure the safety of all those who visit your club? Just filling all the vacant positions for the brief season is a difficult if not an impossible task, yet what knowledge are you imparting to your seasonal employees? Is there even any time to offer them any training or are you just throwing them into the position because you are in peak season?

What are your operational practices? Do you place a tray of tea sandwiches out for the morning tennis players? What are the common offerings: Tuna salad on wheat? Crab salad on pumpernickel? Watercress on white? Mini BLT's on multigrain? Is mayonnaise used? How long do you think you can leave the products out on a 75°F day?

What about your 'Snack Shacks'? Are the hot dogs and hamburgers properly cooked? Sure, we all know about e coli from undercooked burgers, yet what are the effects from an under cooked chicken breast?

And then, there is the question of cross-contamination. Was the cutting board properly cleaned before the chicken breast was put on the grill? Was the knife that trimmed the chicken sanitized before it was used to cut the chopped onions for the condiment tray?

As the palates, desires and sophistication of our members and guests evolve and the menu offerings expand to satisfy everyone. What is being done to ensure safe food is being served? Right now you're thinking, " The chef and some of the kitchen staff are trained in food safety procedures, so we're OK." I would like you to challenge that thought and consider the old adage "The staff doesn't do what you expect, they do what you inspect!". What is common sense for those of us that have been in this industry for awhile is difficult to impart to a new food service recruit!

Bacterial Growth

- Recently, I visited an operation that places sandwiches outside by the tennis court for the morning tennis league. I asked how long the pretty sandwiches (with all the crusts cut-off) were placed outside for their enjoyment. I was informed that the sandwiches were not out for more than 3 hours.
- OK, I thought, knowing that bacteria doubles every twenty minutes. So the quick bacteria growth math is: 2 in 20 minutes; 4 in 40; 8 in an hour; 16 in 1 hour 20 minutes; 32 in 1 hour 40; 64 in 2 hours and over 1 billion cells in 10 hours! And my next thought was: What happens to the employee who tucks a few of these dainty snacks on the side to snag a quick bite before throwing the remainder of the sandwiches away!
- Bacteria survive and grow at temperatures of 41°F to 140° F. Bacteria reproduce rapidly at temperatures between 70° F and 120°F.

Employee Training

- The best thing you could do for all your food service employees would be to have them take a food safety course. Recognizing that you're right in the middle of the season reality paints a different picture. With that in mind I would recommend you create a food safety awareness mind-set especially for your seasonal employees.

Proper cooking temperatures

- Chicken 165°F
- Ground Beef 155°F
- Pork 145°F
- Fish 145°F
- Shell eggs 145°F

Cross contamination awareness

- Make employees aware of the necessity of sanitizing their workstations and tools. A labeled spray bottle of Clorox® and water mixed 1:32 is what many operations use.
- Of equal importance is using disposable gloves; preparing raw and ready-to eat foods in different areas; not using the same towel for multiple tasks (wiping counters / cleaning off the mayonnaise spreader without sanitizing) and proper hand washing.
- Also ensure they wash the produce before using it. This is essential for lettuces, melons and other fruits.

Proper hand washing

- The best training method demonstrated to create awareness is to sing the ABC song, when you are washing your hands. If you're done washing before you're done singing, you haven't washed long enough.

Proper cooling and chilling products

- Ensure the 'snack shack' employees are aware of keeping the products properly chilled.
- This might include that they check the temperature of the refrigerator upon arrival; ensure the condiments are iced; and they discard any salads (tuna, chicken, egg, and crab...) after two days. If they are preparing their own salads on-site, you might require they pre-chill the tuna cans and prepare other items in small batches so time and temperature abuses can not occur. Another concern is replacing the serving utensils for the condiments.

This article scratched the surface for the small food service operation in conjunction with your main kitchen. While a brief article can not convey all the education necessary, the premise is to raise awareness to your guests will return. It is hoped that you have a profitable and safe season.