

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Fall 2012 (Sept./Oct./Nov.)

Stop the Spread!!

Sponges are known to be the number one tool for cleaning and washing, right? Of course - they are cheap, durable, washable, and you can use them on any surface. Did you also know that they have another important quality? Sponges love to grow and hide bacteria in their spongy crevices. So, what are you doing when you are washing dishes and wiping down counter tops, stoves, and dining room tables? What you are really doing is picking up bacteria and spreading them around.



Research shows that sponges are known to harbor bacteria like E.coli, Staphylococcus Aureus, Campylobacter, molds, and yeast. Soap alone will not kill the bacteria. Doesn't sound too good now, right?

According to N.J.A.C. 8:24-4.1(e), sponges **shall not be used** on cleaned and sanitized surfaces or in-use food contact surfaces. They are strictly prohibited in any retail food establishment.

In order to protect your customers from getting unwanted food borne illnesses, here are some alternatives to sponges:

- Stainless steel scrubbing pads
- Heavy duty scour pads
- Non-scratch scour pads



Remember, alternatives will minimize harborage of bacteria. It is very important to replace them frequently and sanitize before and after each use for best results.

Source

Özlem ERDOĞRUL, F. E. (n.d.). *Microorganism in Kitchen Sponges*. Retrieved August 20, 2012, from Internet Journal of Food Safety: <http://www.internetifs.org/articles/iifsv6-4.pdf>

Proper Use of a 3-compartment Sink

Yes, another article on the proper use of a 3-compartment sink. But once again, throughout the summer, as we conducted our inspections, we noticed that many establishments are misusing their 3-compartment sinks. The 3-compartment sink is a vital component of the restaurant; its misuse can be a potential area for the cause of a food borne illness. So here are some rules to ensure proper use of a 3-compartment sink:



- The 3-compartment sink's sole purpose is to sanitize food contact surfaces; it is not an area to wash your hands, or an area to empty out your mop bucket. Hand washing should occur at designated hand washing sinks, and mop buckets should be emptied in mop sinks.
- Before using a 3-compartment sink, please ensure that you properly clean and sanitize the sink. By neglecting to sanitize and clean the sink you are still potentially contaminating your dishes, utensils and food contact surfaces.
- The setup of the sink should be Wash, Rinse, and Sanitize, then air dry.
- Rinse, scrape, or soak all items before washing.
- Wash items in the first sink in a detergent solution. Use a brush, or scrubber to loosen and remove soil. Do not use a sponge. Sponges can harbor bacteria and can be a source for cross contamination. The water temperature in the first compartment should be at least 110°F. Replace the detergent solution when the suds are gone or when the water appears dirty.
- Rinse the washed items in the second compartment by either immersing them in clean rinse water or by spraying them. Make sure all traces of food and detergent are removed.
- To sanitize the washed and rinsed items, dunk them in hot water contained in the third compartment. You must use a chemical sanitizer (Chlorine, quaternary, or ammonia based solution) in this compartment. The sanitizer must be mixed at the proper concentration (follow the manufacturer's directions to assure the proper concentration). It is required as per Chapter 24 of the Sanitary Code that you also have the proper measuring strips to measure the concentration of your sanitizing solution.
- All washed, rinsed and sanitized items should be placed on a clean drain board to air dry. Do not use a towel to dry off sanitized utensils, dishes, or other food contact surfaces.

It is important to realize that all food equipment and utensils must be properly cleaned and sanitized.

While cleaning will remove dirt and particles left on the surface, sanitizing is necessary to reduce the number of bacteria on the surface to safe levels. Proper use of the 3-compartment sink reduces the potential for food borne illness.



WASH, RINSE and SANITIZE pots, pans, glasses, dishes and utensils.

THERMOMETERS



A major cause of food borne illness in restaurants is time-temperature abuse of potentially hazardous food. This is when potentially hazardous food is at temperatures between 41° and 135°F, the temperature danger zone, for four hours or longer. When food is in this temperature range for more than four hours, harmful bacteria can grow and multiply.

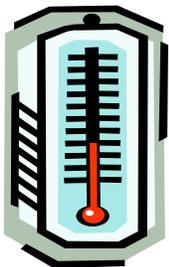
During our routine chapter 24 inspections, we have been seeing an alarming trend; many restaurants are neglecting to have a working thermometer for taking food temperatures and thermometers inside of refrigerators, freezers, and hot holding cases. In some cases, the establishments that do have thermometers haven't removed them from the store packaging! So the question is, how are you ensuring that you are keeping your foods out of the danger zone?

The best way to avoid time-temperature abuse is to minimize the amount of time that potentially hazardous food is in the temperature danger zone, and in order to do this, you need thermometers. You can avoid time and temperature abuse by:

- Constantly checking the temperature of potentially hazardous food during storage, after cooking, and while holding before serving.
- Monitoring how long potentially hazardous food is in the temperature danger zone particularly after it is removed from temperature control (such as taking it out of the refrigerator or removing it from an oven)
- Placing thermometers in refrigerators, freezers and hot-holding cabinets; it is important to check the temperature of refrigerators and freezers at least once a day. Refrigerators should be set no higher than 39°F. Frozen food maintains best quality for the longest time when the freezer is at 0°F or colder. Place at least one refrigerator/freezer thermometer in the warmest location of the refrigerator, on the top shelf near the door.
- Using properly calibrated and sanitized food thermometers to check food temperatures.
- When you suspect an abuse of time or temperature has occurred just discard the food item.



By not having a thermometer to take temperatures of the meats you cook and in your refrigerators, freezers, and hot holding cabinets, you are not in compliance and you are putting your customers at risk for food borne illness. Also, you can save yourself money in food costs by monitoring your refrigeration



temperatures; once you see your refrigeration temperature is in the danger zone you can quickly move your food into a unit that is 39° F or less. Don't let your health inspector be the one to tell you that your refrigeration is out of temperature compliance, because chances are all the food in that refrigerator can be deemed compromised and may have to be thrown away.

Reminders



Use the proper cleaning aid to avoid spreading bacteria.



A 3-compartment sink is not for hand-washing or emptying cleaning buckets.



Use thermometers to monitor temperatures of food and food storage units.

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