OPEN DOORS AND WINDOWS

Most food establishments have been noted with their doors and windows open to the outer air, and failing to keep their screen doors closed -- if they even have a screen door. These are doors and windows leading to the exterior environment whether they are the front, side, or back doors and windows.

Chapter 24 of the New Jersey State Sanitary Code, 8:24 – 6.2(n) is very clear regarding this issue. The following are requirements from this State Code for the protection of outer openings:

"Outer openings of a retail food establishment shall be protected against the entry of insects and rodents by:

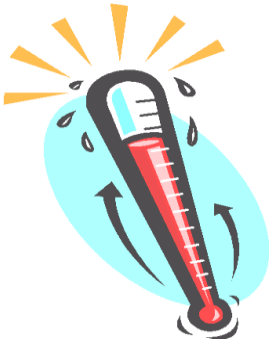
- Filling or closing holes and other gaps along floors, wall, and ceilings;
- Closed, tight-fitting windows; and
- Solid, self-closing, tight-fitting doors."

All openings to the outer air shall be effectively protected against the entrance of insects and rodents by using self-closing doors, closed windows, screening, controlled air currents, or other effective means. Screen doors shall be self-closing; and screens for windows, doors, skylights, and other openings to the outer air shall be tight-fitting and FREE OF BREAKS OR TEARS.

There will be a **ZERO TOLERANCE** policy regarding this issue as we have been emphasizing this for years. All food establishments are expected to comply. **Inspectors will issue signed notices of violation, and repeat offenders will be issued summonses for non-compliance.** Pests such as insects and rodents can pose serious problems for establishments. Not only are they unsightly to customers, they also damage food, supplies, and facilities. The greatest danger from pests comes from their ability to spread disease, including food-borne illnesses.

Preventing insects from entering your establishment is probably the least expensive, as well as the safest method, of insect control. If you can prevent insects from entering your establishment, you will reduce the need to use pesticides, which not only helps the environment, but reduces safety hazards to employees. A prevention program for insect control is far better than an expensive elimination program. It should include a complete sanitation and employee hygiene program, and proper maintenance and upkeep of the food establishment.

Keep it HOT, HOT, HOT!



A great number of complaints from restaurant patrons is that they are being served cold food that should be hot. Not only is the food less appetizing, but it could be dangerous for them as well. In this article, proper cooking temperatures, hot holding and handling techniques will be discussed.

What are the temperatures to cook foods to?

Each meat/fish/poultry needs to be cooked to a different temperature because each one has different bacteria with different cooking temps required to kill it.

Here are the temperatures you need to know:

- Fish and pork need to be cooked to **145°F** to kill parasites
- Ground beef should be cooked to **155°F** to kill E Coli. Undercooked ground beef products should not be served to anyone unless otherwise requested. Children should NEVER be served an undercooked burger because E. coli can cause kidney failure and death in children.
- ANY poultry product, casserole, reheated food or stuffed meat needs to be cooked to **165°F**

How do I hot hold? Hot holding is necessary to keep hot foods safe. To hot hold foods properly, keep foods 135° or hotter. Any lower than 135° allows for rapid bacterial growth.

Is there a proper way to reheat food? Yes! Food needs to be reheated from 41°F to 165°F within two hours to avoid any bacterial growth which causes illness. This can usually be accomplished by placing foods on the stove and bringing them to a boil. Reheating foods to at least 165°F is required to kill any heat resistant bacteria. Placing food from the fridge directly in the hot holding unit will not heat food quickly enough or establish the proper temperature required to kill bacteria. It is very important to monitor temperatures during reheating to make sure it reaches 165°F and, once reheated, is kept at or above 135°F. *NOTE*: Proper reheating of foods to 165° within two hours cannot always undo the damage done when food is cooled improperly. (See article on proper cooling). Both processes are of equal importance to food safety.

Keepin' It Cool

Cooling foods down may seem like such an insignificant part of cooking and maintaining a reputable restaurant, but it is one of the most improperly performed acts in the kitchen and could lead to some of the worst consequences. There are methods to cooling, storing, cold holding for service, and proper handling of foods.

Why is improper cooling so dangerous, anyway? If a food is improperly handled while cooking, and then allowed to cool improperly, the bacteria introduced to the food during cooking will actually *grow* during the cooling of the product. There are many illnesses caused by improper cooling. Most of the bacteria that cause these illnesses form toxins as they grow that poison the people who eat it, and these toxins cannot be cooked out when reheating the food. The bacteria don't have a chance to grow when food is cooled quickly.

How do you cool properly?
Food needs to be temperature monitored during cooking, cooling and reheating. The "**Danger Zone**" (**41°F to 135°F**) is the range of temperature in which bacteria grow rapidly. The idea is to get through the danger zone as quickly as possible. When cooling a food, the clock starts at 135ºF. **You need to get the food from 135°F to 41°F within a total of six hours: Food needs to cool from 135°F to 70°F in the first <u>four</u> hours and then from 70º to 41º in the last <u>two</u>.**

There are multiple tools to help speed the process along, such as cooling wands and ice baths, but it is important to cool foods in multiple shallow pans that are lightly covered to allow more of the food to have surface contact area with the cold air of the refrigerator.

What's important to know about cold holding? Cold holding is the term given to keeping refrigerated items cold, either in the fridge or out in the Bain Marie. All cold items should be held at 41ºF or below. It is a good idea to keep high traffic refrigerators colder than 41ºF because activity raises the temperature of the unit. Monitor your Bain Marie by taking temperatures, and keep thermometers in your fridges and freezers to check their temperatures. Freezers should be holding at 0ºF or less to ensure frozen items remain that way, and items freezing do so quickly. Also, it is important to keep your Bain Maries closed when not in use. If items are going to be kept there after prep is finished for the day, each bin must be covered with plastic lids or plastic wrap.

Is there a proper way store food in a fridge and freezer? Yes! Make sure that everything that is in the fridge or freezer is lightly covered to prevent cross contamination from other foods. To the right is a chart of how food should be stored in a fridge, from top to bottom, to prevent contamination.

REMEMBER: Proper defrosting methods include, defrosting in a fridge, run food under *cold* water, or microwave it then cook it right away.

Proper Guidelines for the Preparation of Sushi Rice in Retail Food Establishments

The prep area for working with sushi & sushi rice should include:
A dedicated or designated sink and table for preparation of the rice and sushi should be cleaned and sanitized before handling the food. A designated sink should be segregated from other concurrent food handling activities. This sink should be properly supplied with hot water, soap, & paper towels. Also, single-use gloves should always be used to prevent bare hand contact with ready-to-eat food. The rice should be washed multiple times or until the water running over the rice is clear.

A written recipe should be followed when preparing sushi rice. This recipe should specify:

- The amount of rice and water prior to cooking, and the cook schedule. The cooked rice and vinegar solution is to be thoroughly mixed to acidify the rice to an initial target pH of 4.1. It is best to acidify the rice when it is warm to assure better mixing and penetration of the acid solution. The vinegar solution should be made fresh for use or from a designated container labeled to identify the contents, concentration and age of the vinegar solution to assure a proper acidifying formulation.

- A clean mixing bowl, deep enough to allow adequate mixing without clumping, yet shallow enough to allow proper cooling. It is best to have less than 4 inches depth in the rice for proper cooling.

Special Note: The initial pH of the sushi rice should be measured within 30 minutes after addition of the vinegar solution. The sushi rice with an initial pH greater than 4.6 should be re-acidified with more vinegar solution and rechecked to assure a targeted pH of 4.1 and an equilibrium pH that does not exceed 4.6.

Measuring and Recording pH of the Sushi Rice

Conduct the pH test within 30 minutes after acidification of the cooked rice and as often as necessary to assure a targeted pH of 4.1 or below.

In order to properly record the pH of your rice batch:

- Make a rice slurry by gathering a 1/4 cup sample of the cooked, acidified rice, taken from various locations in the batch, and add 3/4 cup of distilled water in a clear plastic or metal blend cup (Do not use glass containers in the food preparation area).

- Blend the slurry for approximately 20 seconds to create a thorough mix.

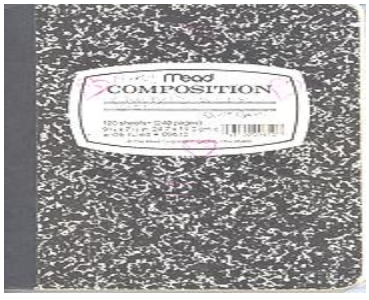
- Insert a properly calibrated pH probe or paper into the liquid portion of the slurry. Repeated measurements with a new slurry from the same batch of rice are recommended to assure a proper reading

1/4 cup of acidified rice

1/2 cup of distilled water

Mix into a slurry

All readings are expected to be entered into a log or journal for EACH BATCH of rice made per day. The date, time, pH reading, and initials of the person performing the acidification should be recorded as well. Each establishment making sushi rice is **REQUIRED TO HAVE A pH METER AND AN UP-TO-DATE LOG BOOK!!**



Reminders

Make sure all doors and windows to your establishments are properly closed. Only doors & windows that have proper screens or air curtains can remain open.

Keep hot foods HOT. All foods in hot holding must have a temperature of at least 135°F.

Keep cold foods COLD. All cold foods should be kept at 41°F or below.

All establishments preparing sushi or sushi rice MUST record the pH of each rice batch. These readings MUST be kept in a daily log.

Sources: Chapter 24 of the New Jersey State Sanitary Code, "*Sanitation in Retail Food Establishments and Food and Beverage Vending Machines.*"; www.AFDO.org "*Guidance for Processing Sushi in Retail Operations*"; www.google.com (images)

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Summer Issue