

Food Safety at the Office

Many people think about food safety at home, but forget that it is just as important at work. Each year in the United States there are 76 million cases of food borne illness that lead to 325,000 hospitalizations and over 5,000 deaths.

Here are some common food safety dilemmas faced in the workplace.

You decide, would you “Keep or Toss?”

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1



Keep or Toss a catered or pot-luck lunch (pizza, tacos, sandwiches, soups, salads) that has been on the conference room table all afternoon for employees to enjoy.

Toss! All perishable foods should be refrigerated **within 2 hours**. After a meal we want to refrigerate foods promptly because bacteria in foods grow & multiply rapidly at room temperature.

Strategy: Plan ahead and have a team assigned to set-up and clean-up.

Have shallow food grade containers available so leftovers can be refrigerated promptly. Prior to the event, check the refrigerator temperature with a refrigerator thermometer. To be safe for food storage, a refrigerator should be 34 - 40°F.

2

Keep or Toss a brown bag or take-out lunch left in the refrigerator for a week or more?

Toss! Refrigerated lunches, like leftovers at home, should be consumed within 2-3 days.

Food left longer is unsafe to eat and can contaminate other foods in the refrigerator. A recent survey found workplace refrigerators are a common problem/complaint.

Strategy: Implement a Refrigerator Policy. Suggested tools and policies include:

- Have a marking pen available by the refrigerator so lunches can be labeled with name and date. Anything unlabeled is at risk for being tossed.
- Establish a weekly cleaning/disposal schedule and post it on the refrigerator so no one is caught unaware.
- Remind employees that we can't always see or smell if a food is unsafe. Tasting questionable food is really risky. Remember if in doubt, it will be thrown out!



3

Keep or Toss a dishcloth in the break room that has been used to clean everything (surfaces, sink, dishes) and has been there for awhile (started out white and is now grey).

Toss! An unclean dishcloth or sponge spreads germs or bacteria everywhere. Like in our homes, the recommendation is to start with a clean dishcloth daily. That may not be a standard we can keep in the workplace.

Strategy: Have paper towels and disposable kitchen wipes available for use in the office kitchen and break room.



4

Keep or Toss a huge bowl of popcorn has been left on the table for everyone to enjoy.

You decide! Keep in mind that it is estimated 50% of foodborne illness is caused by improper handwashing. Do your coworkers wash their hands often and well?

Strategy: Before you bring treats, think of ways to prevent bare hand contact of foods. Supply a serving spoon and bowls, or package popcorn in plastic zipper snack bags for a take-and-eat snack.



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