

HACCP-Based SOPs Education Module

Using and Calibrating Thermometers

Definition: To prevent foodborne illness by ensuring that the appropriate type of thermometer is used to measure internal product temperatures and that thermometers used are correctly calibrated for accuracy.

Information:

1. Follow District, State or local health department requirements.
2. Follow the food thermometer manufacturer's instructions for use. Use a food thermometer that measures temperatures from 0 °F (-18 °C) to 220 °F (104 °C) and is appropriate for the temperature being taken. For example:
 - Bimetallic, dial-faced stem thermometers are accurate only when measuring temperatures of thick foods. They may be used to measure temperatures of thin foods only if food is measured in a stack form. A dimple mark located on the stem of the thermometer indicates the maximum food thickness that can be accurately measured.
 - Use only oven-safe, bimetallic thermometers when measuring temperatures of food while cooking in an oven.
3. Have food thermometers easily accessible to foodservice employees during all hours of operation.
4. Clean and sanitize food thermometers before each use. Refer to the Germ Warfare - Food Contact Surfaces Education for the proper procedures to follow.
5. Store food thermometers in an area that is clean and where they are not subject to contamination.

MONITORING:

1. Foodservice employees will use either the ice-point method or boiling-point method to verify the accuracy of food thermometers. This is known as calibration of the thermometer.
2. To use ice-point method:
 - Insert the thermometer probe into a cup of crushed ice.
 - Add enough cold water to remove any air pockets that might remain.
 - Allow the temperature reading to stabilize before reading temperature.
 - Temperature measurement should be 32 °F (± 2 °F) [or 0 °C (± 1 °C)]. If not, adjust according to manufacturer's instructions.
3. To use boiling-point method:
 - Immerse at least the first two inches of the probe into boiling water.
 - Allow the temperature reading to stabilize before reading temperature.
 - Reading should be 212 °F (± 2 °F) [or 100 °C (± 1 °C)]. This reading may vary at higher altitudes. If adjustment is required, follow manufacturer's instructions.

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4. Foodservice employees will check the accuracy of the food thermometers and record this using the Thermometer Calibration Log at the following times:

- At regular intervals (at least once per week)
- If dropped
- If used to measure extreme temperatures, such as in an oven
- Whenever accuracy is in question

CORRECTIVE ACTION:

1. Retrain any foodservice employee found not following these procedures.
2. For an inaccurate, bimetallic, dial-faced thermometer, adjust the temperature by turning the dial while securing the calibration nut (located just under or below the dial) with pliers or a wrench.
3. For an inaccurate, digital thermometer with a reset button, adjust the thermometer according to manufacturer's instructions.
4. If an inaccurate thermometer cannot be adjusted on-site, discontinue using it, and discard or follow manufacturer's instructions for having the thermometer calibrated.
5. Retrain employees who are using or calibrating food thermometers improperly.