

# HOW TO WRITE A FOOD SAFETY PLAN

BY SALLY DE LA RUE BROWNE, REHO



**F**ood safety plans are required by health units as part of their approach to the culture of food safety. Recent outbreaks involving prepared meats from Maple Leaf Meats, salmonella from rodent droppings in peanuts, and E. coli from bagged spinach have impacted consumers resulting in deaths and permanent injuries because of consuming these foods. As part of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point System, food safety plans are designed to help chefs be proactive in the foodservice establishment as opposed to being reactive when the foodborne illness outbreak occurs.

These examples of outbreaks have cost money, provided negative publicity and resulted in job loss. Practicing safe food handling techniques does reduce the risk. After all, customers are meant to receive a safe meal and not become ill after visiting a restaurant.

What is the best way to deal with prevention in your restaurant kitchen? With a food safety plan, you will identify the hazardous menu items served and reduce the risks for each item. Your Food

Safety Plan can either be process-based or recipe-based. For example, if you cook different types of meats similarly such as grilling or frying, you can write a process-based plan. However, if you use mainly recipes in the kitchen, you can write plans based on your recipes for the potentially hazardous menu items. For example, if you have a recipe-based plan for sandwiches, you can write one general plan and include the different fillings instead of writing separate plans for roast beef sandwiches, ham sandwiches, etc. The goal is to identify the hazardous practices and change them so that food poisoning will not result.

Before plans are written or put into practice, it is assumed that chefs and kitchen staff are already practicing safe food handling techniques such as changing plastic gloves between different tasks. For example, if a chef prepares meatballs and then goes to prepare sandwiches, the plastic gloves must be removed, discarded, and another pair used before preparing sandwiches. Otherwise, cross-contamination will result and the risk of foodborne illness increases. Proper cleaning and

sanitizing must be taking place in the kitchen under the Sanitation Plan as this will keep the utensils and equipment sanitary for use. One inspection conducted years ago showed maggots in the meat slicing machine because staff had forgotten to clean one corner and meat slices had dropped down and never been removed. Also, raw foods should be prepared separately from cooked foods and the utensils used for each should be washed and sanitized before re-using.

A FOOD SAFETY PLAN IS MADE UP OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- Steps in the preparation of the food
- Identifying the hazards
- Identifying safety steps versus critical steps
- Outlining control measures
- Monitoring actions
- Outlining corrective actions.

Generally, steps will include the receiving, storing, preparing, cooking, serving, hot holding, cooling or re-heating of the food. The identification of hazards will be either biological, chemical or physical. Salmonella is a biological hazard with chicken. Detergents stored in a kitchen in a fruit juice container can be a chemical hazard. Glass which broke in the kitchen and ended up in the chocolate pudding is a physical hazard.

Safety steps are part of safe food handling techniques such as stock rotation, storing raw products below cooked products in a cooler, labeling foods, and providing shelving at least 6 inches or 15 centimetres off the floor in the cooler. Critical steps are steps which must be taken and carried out correctly. An example is cooking all potentially hazardous foods to the correct internal temperature, eg. 74° C or 165° F for chicken so that salmonella bacteria are destroyed.

Control measures can be taken to minimize or reduce the hazard. The control measure for cooking chicken would be to cook the chicken to 74° C for a certain period of time until the chicken is cooked throughout and no pink meat is visible.

By monitoring all the actions, and keeping records of the temperatures, etc. of the food, the final steps of the food safety plan are completed and the risk of a foodborne illness outbreak has been reduced. **CQ**

Sally de la Rue Browne is a Registered Environmental Health Officer and food safety consultant. She provides training, writing and consulting services to the foodservice and hospitality industry. She teaches courses on food-safe, allergy aware and HACCP. Further info is available at [www.envirofood.net](http://www.envirofood.net).