

Reheating Policy

So, maybe you've been running restaurants for twenty years. Or maybe you just graduated from a prestigious culinary school. You know what you're doing. So why did you still get a reheating violation?

Maybe it's time to create a reheating policy, so you can ensure that your employees know what to check, when to check it, and what to do if something isn't right.

First of all, what is a policy and how do you create a reheating policy for your food establishment?

A policy is a defined set of actions that minimize food safety risks. Although some small food establishments may have verbal policies, it is best to write your policies down.

Here are the key steps to consider when developing any policy:

- **Include the key people at the table**
- **Identify the most important steps in your processes**
- **Ensure that your policy includes corrective actions**
- **Revise the policy based on problems that arise, or as your food processes change**

Let's look at each of these steps more closely.

When writing your policy, make sure you are including the key people in your establishment, and also consider which staff members may be involved in each step. Who is your Certified Food Manager? Who conducts reheating line checks? Do you have multiple shift leads who oversee your establishment throughout the day? If your establishment is part of a national chain that has uniform standards, you may want to include a regional manager or Quality Assurance personnel in writing your reheating policy.

Now let's take a closer look at the second point. Here are common operations in a kitchen. Where could a reheating issue arise in each of these steps?

Preparation

Review various menu items that are prepared in your establishment. Consider whether reheating temperatures are maintained during preparation. Are you reheating food that was previously cooled to below 41°F or a commercially prepackaged food that is room temperature?

Reheating

Recall that time/temperature control for safety (TCS) foods must be held at 135°F or higher. Reheating foods for the purpose of hot holding are handled differently depending on how they were prepared. If you are reheating foods that had previously been cooled to below 41°F, you must reheat the food to 165°F or higher prior to placing it in a hot holding unit. If the food item is from a commercially sealed container, you have to reheat it to at least 135°F prior to placing in a hot holding unit. If you are reheating food for immediate service, there are no minimum temperature requirements the food has to be reheated to. You may want to review what menu items in your establishment will undergo a reheating step. You may want to include logs for reheating food temperatures. Consider employee behaviors to encourage, such as frequent stirring of thick soups. Also think about employee behaviors to discourage, such as using a steam table to reheat foods, which are not designed to rapidly increase food temperatures.

Ask these questions for each of these operations:

Who is responsible?

Who is working with hot TCS foods? Who oversees the process? Who is responsible for execution?

What needs to happen?

TCS foods must be reheated to the appropriate temperatures. Previously cooled TCS foods must be reheated to at least 165°F prior to being placed in a hot holding unit. Commercially prepackaged foods must be reheated to at least 135°F prior to being placed in a hot holding unit. With reheating, it is especially important to check for variations in temperature throughout a food product, and the capability of reheating equipment to rapidly reheat the food to the appropriate temperatures (within 2 hours).



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When does it take place?

Think about pre-opening activities, especially steps that impact reheating (time and equipment required). Also consider restocking food between lunch and dinner or throughout the day.

Where does it occur?

Include all reheating equipment used. Also include equipment that should NOT be used for reheating.

How is this achieved?

When reheating foods, the process must be rapid. Hot holding equipment should not be used for reheating foods. Temperature monitoring of the food itself is a critical step in the success of this process. This is where you can incorporate logs and documentation. Sample logs are provided as part of our toolbox. You may want to include steps about how thermometers are used and how staff will document temperatures.

As you review these key operational steps, consider whether it would make sense in your business model to write several policies for reheating. For example, you might write one policy for reheating previously cooled foods and another for reheating commercially prepackaged foods.

Now for the Corrective Actions. This is the “what if...” step. What if something goes wrong? Your policy should state what actions are taken if correct reheating procedures are not in place. You can include a space for writing in corrective actions on your logs.

But don't stop here! Your reheating policy is a living document, and will change over time. When you discover areas of non-compliance in your establishment, use them as opportunities to improve, and return to your policy to incorporate the changes. In this way, you will continue to improve.

To summarize, here are the key steps to consider with any policy:

- **Include the key people at the table**
- **Identify the most important steps in your processes**
- **Check that your policy answers the questions: who, what, when, where, why and how**



- **Ensure that your policy includes corrective actions**
- **Revise the policy based on problems that arise, or as your food processes change**

Remember, if you don't train your employees on your reheating policy, it won't do much to help your establishment. So check out the next document, a Manager's Guide to training your employees.

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