

BVPPH Newsletter to our Food Establishments

BVPPH – Blackstone Valley Partnership for Public Health

Representing the Towns of Blackstone, Douglas, Hopedale, Mendon, Millville, Northbridge, Upton and Uxbridge
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Dear Newsletter Recipient,

Welcome to the 3rd Quarterly Newsletter from the Blackstone Valley Partnership for Public Health! This month's topic is about an important component of managing a restaurant or any other food establishment: maintaining your logs. This topic will discuss three of the more important tasks you'll need to do throughout your day or week and give you some advice for organizing these logs so that they're not disruptive and are painless as possible.

Overview

It is no exaggeration to say that operating a food establishment is a challenging task. There are hundreds of details that the food establishment operator must keep track of, from employee schedules to grease trap pumping records to inventory reports. But while there is enough paperwork to make someone's head spin, without it, running an establishment would be next to impossible. In fact, helping to organize who needs to do what and when is an effective way to keep focused and help you plan how you manage your time.

This quarter's newsletter deals with creating work-logs. Specifically, it tackles logs to help keep track of two of the most common causes of foodborne illness: time-temperature control and sanitation of the establishment.

Managing Your Logs

There are three logs that you are recommended to maintain for your food establishment: temperature, sanitizer, and general cleaning logs. Each log should be maintained on either a daily or weekly basis, and the more thorough the logs are, the more of a headache they will save you in the future. Below you'll find a description of each of these three logs, why they are important, and how often they need to be completed.

Temperature Logs: Time-temperature abuse, or when a food item is kept within the temperature danger zone (between 41- and 135-degrees Fahrenheit) for too long, is one of the most common causes for foodborne illness. Bacteria grow best at these temperatures, and after a certain period (usually 4 – 6 hours), they will have grown to a point where they could easily make someone sick. Additionally, many of these bacteria produce toxins as a byproduct of their cell

division, or else can turn into spores when they reach a high enough population density. In both cases, this makes the bacteria or its byproducts resistant to cooking. In short, once food has been time-temperature abused, it usually must be thrown away.

If a health inspector comes into your establishment and notes that your food is within the temperature danger zone, that inspector might order one of two things. If there's some sort of tangible evidence that the food has been in that danger zone for under 4 hours, then there is time to bring it back into a safe temperature range. However, if no such evidence exists, or if the food has been stored improperly for longer than 4 hours, the inspector will order the food to be discarded. Obviously, this is something a food establishment will want to avoid, since it could mean a significant loss of revenue.

Thus, the temperature log. By checking your products regularly and recording their temperature, you will have a record to indicate when you last tested the food. This record could serve as the evidence an inspector needs to order you to move the food to a colder/warmer location, rather than to discard it. By diligently maintaining this log, you could save yourself money on lost product and decrease the likelihood of foodborne illness, which could have disastrous consequences for your business.

So how does a temperature log work? First, make sure you have a readily available, properly calibrated probe thermometer. This can either be a simple analog bimetallic probe thermometer, or a more complex digital thermocouple or thermistor. You'll want to use a probe thermometer to measure the internal temperature of your food items, since the ambient air or surface temperature (as read by a thermometer kept inside the equipment or by infrared) is not nearly as accurate as a dedicated probe. NOTE: vacuum sealed food cannot be tested with a probe, since damaging the packaging could compromise the food item. Make sure your staff know how to operate and how to properly clean and sanitize the thermometer between use. Additionally, make sure to calibrate your thermometer at least once per shift (or if it's heavily jostled or exposed to extreme temperatures) to make sure that it's accurate.

The temperature log itself should be a simple table (see below). It does not have to be professional or fancy in appearance; so long as it does the job, it can be as simple as a piece of lined note paper kept in a folder. The log should have the following information:

- The location of the food item being tested (i.e. was it in the walk-in cooler, the line cooler, the steam table, etc.),
- The name of the food item in question (e.g. cheese, raw chicken, marinara),
- The time the temperature was taken,
- The temperature reading,
- Who performed the testing,
- What actions, if any, did you take to remediate a temperature issue (e.g. "food discarded" or "food item moved to different cooling unit" or "cooling unit temperature reduced by staff."

As for how often to adjust the log, there are two options. The first is to complete the log once every 4 hours. This is the minimum timeframe to verify that time-temperature abuse has not occurred, since if there are any foods that are in the wrong temperature, they can be discarded before a member of the public could be exposed. However, because any food item that was in the

temperature danger zone has been exposed for more than four hours, the only appropriate remediation is to discard the food item. Therefore, the recommended timeframe is to conduct temperature checks every *two* (2) hours. This way, if a food item is found to be in the temperature danger zone, there is still time to attempt to bring it back into the proper temperature range. Make sure to verify that whatever corrective action you've taken is working, however. For example, if you move raw chicken out of your walk-in because its internal temperature was 46 F, make sure the temperature has been brought down to 41 F or below in its new location within those 2 hours. Otherwise, the corrective action was insufficient and you'll need to discard that food item (and likely other affected items). The record lets you keep track of the state of your food items and equipment and gives you time and information so you can save your products. Additionally, this will allow an inspector to examine your records and possibly allow them the option of requesting you move a food item to a different holding unit rather than order the item discarded outright.

Sanitizer Logs: Much like food temperature, sanitizer concentration is crucial to maintaining a clean and hygienic food establishment and reducing the risk of foodborne illness. All sanitizer solutions have an ideal concentration, depending on what type of sanitizer is being used. Most sanitizers, if mixed with water and exposed to air, heat, or constant use, will break down and drop in concentration. As a result, you should check your sanitizer regularly with the appropriate chemical test kit and replace it when needed if you see the concentration fall below acceptable levels.

A sanitizer log should include the following:

- The location of the sanitizer,
- What time the test was taken,
- The concentration level at the time of the test,
- Who took the test,
- And what corrective actions (if any) were taken.

Typically, sanitizer solution that has been properly prepared as per manufacturer's instructions will last between 2 – 4 hours. As a result, much like food temperatures, this log should be maintained every 2 – 4 hours. Heavy use or exposure to heat or sunlight can change sanitizer concentration as well, so if you find the concentration falls low very quickly, you may want to check the concentration more frequently. Because the sanitizer log and the temperature log have very similar recommended timeframes, it might be a good idea to coordinate the maintenance of these logs.

Please note that for pre-mixed, commercially packaged sanitizer (such as a sanitizer spray), you do not have to check the concentration as frequently. Likely once per shift is enough, just to verify that the mixture hasn't been diluted by excess heat or other causes in the environment, or that it hasn't broken down faster than expected. Remember that just like any product, bottled sanitizer solution could have been improperly mixed, handled, or stored, and thus have a lower concentration at purchase than what is advertised, so it's always better to be safe than sorry. Sanitizer whose concentration is too low won't be strong enough to reduce pathogens and won't protect your customers from foodborne illness.

Cleaning Log: A cleaning log is a little different from the other two logs recommended in this

article, but no less important. According to the FDA, improper sanitation and unclean food-contact surfaces are some of the leading causes of foodborne illness. Thus, keeping your establishment clean is in the best interest of your business and your customers.

Rather than being a formal log with a specific critical point (like temperature or sanitizer concentration), a cleaning log keeps track of who cleaned what and when. This allows you to easily check if certain equipment is being cleaned frequently enough to help prevent contamination, as well as reduce clutter, grime build-up, and harborage conditions for pests.

First, identify which areas in your restaurant must be cleaned most frequently, especially items that must be cleaned multiple times per day. This usually applies to all surfaces that come into direct contact with food (cutting boards, knives, utensils, dicers, re-usable cups and plates, etc.). Some surfaces, such as plates at a restaurant, must be cleaned regularly after each use. Others, such as food-contact surfaces in continuous use (like a popcorn machine or coffee pot) might only need to be cleaned at the end of a shift.

Items that must be cleaned between each use are not typically added to a cleaning log. However, you should make sure all staff are trained to clean that equipment between uses, and store clean equipment in a properly designated area so that other staff can know which equipment is ready for use. Instead, your log should focus on daily and weekly cleanings. Once you've identified these items and determined how frequently they need to be cleaned, assign those tasks to specific staff. Divide up the work evenly and consistently, and make sure staff are trained to note in the log once they've completed a specific cleaning task. Make sure to listen closely to staff feedback about how the division of labor is being conducted, to make sure that people are being assigned tasks they are physically capable of doing (such as not assigning staff who might not be able to reach certain equipment without at least providing them assistance), and that labor is being equitably divided. Review the records frequently to make sure things are being completed, and ideally, have a manager verify that cleaning is being done every now and again. Review your cleaning schedule as needed. For example, if your grease vents are accumulating a large amount of grease, they should be cleaned more frequently. The reverse can also be true in some cases, but make sure you focus your attention particularly on surfaces that come into contact with food or come into contact with equipment that itself comes into contact with food (such as drying racks or ovens).

Blackstone Valley Partnership for Public Health - BVPPH

Blackstone Board of Health (508-883-1500 x129)
Hopedale Board of Health (508-634-2203 x222)
Douglas Board of Health (508-476-4000 x252)
Mendon Board of Health (508-634-2656)

Millville Board of Health (508-883-5041)
Northbridge Board of Health (508-234-3272)
Upton Board of Health (508-529-6813)
Uxbridge Board of Health (508-278-8600 x8)

Sample Time-Temperature Log

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