

Tips for Maintaining Refrigeration Equipment

Retail Food Establishments - Food Safety

During summer months, commercial coolers (refrigerators) and freezers in retail food establishments work hard to try to keep time/temperature control for safety (TCS) foods maintained at 41°F or less despite the heat. An issue that causes a cooler or freezer to stop working properly could contribute to a foodborne illness and/or the loss of valuable product.

Regular cleaning and maintenance of refrigeration equipment will help minimize the impact of hot summer weather.

The following steps promote efficient and effective operation of refrigeration equipment:

- **Condenser and Evaporator Coils** - Remove dust, dirt, grease, and other debris from the coils on a regular basis. Buildup on coils puts a strain on the system, making it difficult for the equipment to remove heat.
- **Door Gaskets (seals)** – Check gaskets for tears and cracks and replace as needed. Gaskets are designed to make the door airtight to maintain and recover cool temperatures efficiently. Gaps and cracks in gaskets allow warm air to enter the refrigeration equipment.
- **Filters** – Monitor any filters to make sure they are clean and free of dust and debris.
- **Spacing (clearance)** - Most refrigeration units require minimum spacing from walls and other equipment to allow airflow around the exterior of the unit. Inadequate spacing causes the refrigeration unit to work harder. Guidance on minimum required spacing may be found in the manufacturer's installation or owner's manual.
- **Location** – Some refrigeration units are designed to effectively maintain temperatures when the unit is in an area that does not routinely get warmer than the temperature specified on its label. A refrigeration unit located near heat producing equipment may affect its ability to perform efficiently.
- **Temperature Control** – On a regular basis (i.e., at the beginning and ending of the day, at the beginning of each shift change, etc.), check the internal temperature of the refrigeration unit. Coolers must keep TCS foods at 41°F or less, while foods stored in freezers should be frozen solid. An adjustment to the temperature setting may resolve temperature concerns. When an adjusted temperature setting does not result in cooler temperatures, it may be an indication that the refrigeration unit is malfunctioning. **Foods must be immediately relocated to a properly working refrigeration unit until the specified unit can be serviced.** Keeping a refrigeration temperature log may help determine if foods are safe or should be thrown out.
- **Thermometers and other Temperature Measuring Devices** – Make sure internal thermometers or other temperature measuring devices are working properly. Repair or replace as needed.
- **Cleaning/Organization** – The interior of refrigeration units should be kept clean and organized. An overstuffed, poorly organized unit will minimize the ability of cool air to properly circulate.
- **Power** - Electrical outlets used for refrigeration units should be designed for the type of equipment installed. Refrigeration equipment should be plugged into sockets that provide the needed volts or wattage to make sure the equipment is operating as designed.

