

# Date Marking



## What is date marking and how is it used?

Date marking is a way to ensure food safety. It is also the law. Date marking is an identification system for ready-to-eat foods held over 24 hours, so you know how old they are. The system helps to identify either when food was prepared or when it is to be discarded.

## How do I know if food needs to be date marked?

1. Does the food require refrigeration?
2. If commercially packaged, has the original package been opened?
3. Is the food ready-to-eat? Could this food be eaten just like it is, regardless of temperature? Examples of ready-to-eat foods include cold cooked ground beef and cold cooked pizza.
4. Is the food potentially hazardous? Will it support the growth of bacteria? Example, *Listeria monocytogenes* is associated with soft cheeses and deli meats.
5. Will the food be in the establishment for more than 24 hours? This counts even if the food is, or will be, mixed with something else to make a new product.

If you answered **YES** to all five (5) of these questions then the food needs to be date marked.

## When to discard?

Foods shall be held 41 °F or below and discarded if not consumed within seven (7) days

## Common date marking questions?

### **If the food has an expiration date on it, isn't that the same as a date mark?**

No, the expiration date is the date through which the manufacture guarantees the food will meet their quality standards. Date marking for discard ensures the safety of the food. Although, be sure that the date mark used by the establishment does not exceed the manufacturer's date.

### **The establishment goes through food so fast, if it is going to be used in less than 7 days do I still need to date mark?**

Yes, if the food is not going to be served or discarded within 24 hours, it must be date marked.

### **What if I freeze the food?**

Freezing food stops the date marking clock but it does not reset it. So if a food is stored at 41°F for 2 days then frozen, it can still be stored at 41°F for 5 more days when it begins to thaw. The freezing date and the thawing date need to be put on the container along with the preparation date or an indication of how many of the original 7 days have been used. If food is not dated with these dates, it must be used or discarded within 24 hours.

### **What if I mix the food with something else?**

When foods are mixed together the date of the **oldest** food becomes the new date for the mixed food. Example, if you are mixing a food that was prepared and dated on Monday with a food that was prepared and dated from Tuesday, the mixed food would be dated with the Monday's date.

### **Are there any exceptions? YES**

- Uncut portions of processed cured meats packaged in cellulose, like salami and bologna do not need to be date marked until opened.
- Hard cheeses like Asiago, Cheddar, Gruyere, Parmesan, Romano and Sapsago do **not** need to be date marked.
- Semisoft cheeses like fresh Asiago, Soft, Blue, Brick, Colby, Edam, Gouda, Monterey, Pasteurized process cheese, Provolone and Swiss do **not** need to be date marked
- Commercially prepared and acidified dressings like mayonnaise or salad dressings do **not** need to be date marked.

