



Time as a Public Health Control

There are two methods available to keep foods safe during holding after preparation. The first and most common method is holding foods using proper temperature control (< 41°F or >135°F). The second method uses time. Both methods, *when used correctly*, prevent and control the risk of food borne illnesses.

Time may be used as a public health control for a working supply of potentially hazardous, ready to eat foods that are displayed or held for service for **immediate consumption**. Using time is great for those foods that are difficult to maintain at proper temperature during holding. This includes foods on buffets, salad bars and similar items held until ordered like sliced pizza or prepared sandwiches. Using time as a public health control is easy, however, there are some very important things that must be in place and strictly followed to prevent people from getting ill. They are as follows:

- ❶ **#1 RULE** – Once the operator has begun using this method, foods can not be cooled or go back into refrigeration regardless of temperature – **They must be discarded!**
- ❷ Due to the fact the foods will be in the temperature danger zone (41°F - 135°F), using time as a public health control only allows foods to be held for **four (4) hours**. ***ALL FOODS NOT SERVED OR CONSUMED WITHIN FOUR (4) HOURS MUST BE DISCARDED!***
- ❸ To track this, the foods must be marked or otherwise identified with the time when they have expired. This is four hours past the time when they were removed from temperature control.
 - ➔ For example, if a meatloaf is placed on the buffet at 12:00 pm the operator must be aware that the meatloaf shall be consumed or discarded by 4:00 pm – four (4) hours from the start time of 12:00 pm. The discard time must be marked or identified in some manner for the meatloaf. *However, if the buffet closes at 2:00 pm, the meatloaf must still be discarded.*
- ❹ Foods not properly identified with a discard time or foods that the time has expired (4 hours) must be discarded.

Finally, a **written procedure** must be maintained and available in the food establishment to include:

1. which food items will be managed with this procedure
2. how the time will be tracked, labeled or marked, if it applies
3. and those employees responsible for the various tasks.

The written procedure must be followed to ensure all food items are labeled, tracked and discarded to prevent any possible food borne illnesses.



For more information on “Time as a Public Health Control” contact the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services at (804) 786-3520.