

The Everclean Report



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Expired Foods

It is important not to use products after their expiration date. Not only can it take away from the desired flavors and recipes of your dishes, but eating expired foods greatly increases the risk of developing a case of Listeria infection. These infections can actually be deadly in some cases. Listeria illness is caused by a bacteria known as *Listeria monocytogenes*. This bacteria is commonly found in the soil and can contaminate both vegetable and animal food products. When this bacteria enters the body, it has the potential of causing food borne illness.

The best way to protect your customers is to practice safe food handling. This means abiding by the expiration date on foods, particularly meat and dairy products. Learning the tell-tale signs of spoiled meats, like slimy texture and foul odor is very important. Interpreting expiration dates on food packages and cartons can be confusing with terminology like "Sell By", "Use By", "Expires" and even "Best if Enjoyed By". The best way to protect your customers and your brand is to discard any expired products.

Date Marking

The FDA requires all refrigerated ready to eat (RTE) potentially hazardous foods (PHF) to be properly dated for a number of reasons. Not all health departments enforce these standards, but understanding the reasons can assist your operations with training and understanding.

- Prepared RTE PHF's must be used/sold within 7 days of preparation. Even under refrigeration, foods can spoil and become unsafe to eat. While your standards for your location may be tighter than the 7 days, date marking can ensure that you are serving safe food.
- Hand in hand with that, date marking assists with proper rotation (also called FIFO - first in, first out) which can assist your operation with quality standards and assist costs.

Date marking can be done in several different ways, including using date stickers, labels or dated portion bags.

Expired Food vs Date Marking

It is also important to ensure that your date marking does not exceed the original expiration date on all RTE (Ready To Eat) PHF's (Potentially Hazardous Foods). An example might be opening a container of potato salad on Nov 1st which expired on Nov 3rd per manufacture's expiration date. The shelf life of the product is 7 days but once opened you must still use the Nov. 3 expiration date as your date marking expiration date. In other words, your date marking date cannot exceed the manufacture's expiration date.

Remember the expirations dates and date marking will help ensure your establishment is serving safe food to all your customers. Help your employees understand what the expired food dates and date marking are and why it is so important that they are aware of the dates on the packages.

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