



Food Security Self Assessment

A Guide for Retail Food Stores

Everyone talks about security, but what can a retail food establishment operator do?

Use this guide to perform a self-assessment of your operation, which will help you identify any potential security issues that may need improvement.

Why should I be concerned about food security at my establishment?

The retail food establishment operator is really on the front lines when it comes to protecting our food supply. Millions of people purchase food of every description in retail food stores daily. When you consider how many opportunities there are for someone to tamper with food, it's no wonder food security is a hot topic.

Why are food establishments at risk?

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security and other government agencies have identified food establishments as a potential "target" for intentional terrorist attack. Attacking our food supply is a sure way to attack our economy, and has the potential to cause physical and emotional harm to our citizens. Even a small attack could bankrupt individual food establishments.

Why am I at risk? What can I do about it?

Everyone is at risk, and it may not be clear who would want to harm innocent people. The best way to minimize risk is to be prepared. The best way to be prepared is to discover what the weaknesses are in your food security and food safety programs, and take preventive measures.

How can I know for sure what my security weaknesses are?

Self-assessment of your operation can be valuable in helping you decide how to lower your risk of becoming a target.

How is a self- assessment performed?

A self-assessment of your operation will take less than an hour and provide you with a new view of your operation. Self-assessment is a way to know exactly what is happening in your establishment. It can bring your operation into focus, and provide you with a snapshot of your operation. Be sure and ask your employees how each task is performed; don't rely on what you think is happening.

Since self-assessment has long been used as a powerful management tool for continuous improvement, you may find ways to change your operation for the better, as well as improving your security and safety.

There are three basic steps to self-assessment:

1. Document your operation. Write down what and how things are done. Don't worry about how your documents look, this is just for you.
2. Examine your systems against recommended practices or standards. See how you measure up. Note areas where changes may have to be made to improve the security of your facility.
3. Get help where you need it. Consult with experts, including your regional Department of Agriculture & Markets office, your vendors, your local police department, for advice on how to address safety and security issues.



Your Facility

Unauthorized access to your operation is a security risk. If someone can get in easily, your operation may become a target for food tampering or other illegal activity that might harm your operation.

Key Points:

1. Restrict access to non-customer areas.
2. Make it difficult for unauthorized personnel to use or be near your service doors without being seen.

Security Strategies:

Property Security

- Outside lighting. Don't make it easy for anyone to approach your facility without being seen.
- Regular police patrols.
- Fences and other barriers around your property to keep unwanted foot traffic away from your building.
- Video surveillance is expensive, but if there have been problems with building security in the past, it may be a wise investment.

Building Security

- Keep your service doors closed, and lock them to prevent access from the outside.
- Discourage employee loitering in door areas and unattended deliveries.
- Restrict key access to trusted employees. Know who has keys at all times. Don't have too many copies of keys to your facility.

Your Employees

Employees are vital to food safety and security. They are in charge of many tasks, often without direct supervision.

Key Points:

1. Know as much as you can about your employees and verify information provided.
2. Train your employees to recognize potential security risks and report them to the management. Ensure each shift manager knows what to do if a report is received.

Security Strategies:

New Employees

- Perform complete background checks on all potential employees. Verify references, addresses and phone numbers.
- Train all new employees to recognize food safety and security threats, including product tampering, and what actions to take if an event occurs.
- Actively supervise employees, and ensure they follow established procedures each time they perform their tasks. Standardized procedures will quickly show when someone is not where they should be and/or doing what they should.

All Employees

- Retaining employees is a better security strategy than constantly hiring new —not only will you develop more trust, your employees will perform at a higher level of skill.
- Keep all personal items out of work and storage areas. Have a separate place for storing belongings.
- Restrict access to areas not needed by employees.
- Keep a roster of all employees expected on each shift.
- Discourage off-duty and former employees from loitering on the premises.

Your Products

Buying, storing and using food items requires a strategy for protecting your customers and your investment.

Key Points:

1. Know who is delivering and what they are delivering to your facility.
2. Store items properly, segregating food from other materials.

Security Strategies:

Receiving

- Purchase food products from known vendors and inspect all purchases for damage.
- Have all deliveries arrive when staff is present. Do not use food that is dropped off when staff is not present or without your knowledge.
- Inspect and store food immediately after delivery. Do not allow food to sit in the receiving area.

Storage

- Store food and non-food items separately. Keep items safe and secure.
- Know the types of chemicals on hand and have appropriate Material Safety Data Sheets available. Keep storage areas secure.
- Restrict access to storage areas. Food storage areas should be secure. Keep your storage rooms from becoming break rooms.
- Outside warehouse storage should be secure at all times and opened only when needed.
- Lock all storage areas when unattended.

Your Food Preparation Steps

Routine practices can lower the risk of security violations.

Key Points:

1. Develop a routine for all tasks. When food is prepared the same way every time, it is easier to know when something is not right.
2. Know safe temperatures for hot and cold holding, and check temperatures often. Safe temperatures can minimize risk of a foodborne illness.

Security Strategies:

Food Preparation

- Inspect packaged goods for damage prior to using.
- Examine ingredients before using them. Do not include foods that look or smell abnormal.
- Cook product thoroughly, according to Agriculture & Markets regulations to minimize the risk of food pathogens growing in the food product.
- Use a calibrated probe thermometer to determine doneness every time.

Food Holding

- Keep hot food hot (135°F or above). Keep cold food cold (41°F or below). Check temperatures often and keep lids closed.
- Keep access to holding units restricted to only those who serve the food item.
- Enforce “no bare hand” policies to prevent anyone from intentionally or unintentionally contaminating food with their hands.

Your Customer Service Area

Keeping track of the service area in your facility is important to control the opportunities for an outsider to affect your products.

Key Points:

1. Keep self-service stations in areas that staff can easily supervise.
2. Check customer access areas for unattended items.

Security Strategies:

Customers

- Keep customers out of food preparation areas.
- Be aware if anyone is lingering in self-service areas or seems overly interested in your operations.
- Do not discuss your security measures with anyone, unless there is a need.
- Be wary of packages and bags left unattended. They could be intentional contaminants.

Self-Service Areas

- Keep self-service areas in line with permanent stations. Example: the salad bar should be able to be clearly observed from a cashier station.
- Rotate permanent items, such as croutons or grated cheese regularly.
- Do not put out more food than you need. Put out new supplies in clean and sanitized containers.

Your Cleaning Practices

One of your best defenses against a biological agent or a foodborne illness is your cleaning and sanitizing routine.

Key Points:

1. Make sure you understand instructions for using equipment and cleaners. Improper use can lessen the cleaning effect.
2. Clean and sanitize as often as possible.

Security Strategies:

Cleaning

- Clean and sanitize food contact surfaces after each task, using approved methods.
- Clean and sanitize containers on self-service areas after each batch is used.
- Use cleaners and sanitizers properly. Ask your supplier or Department of Agriculture & Markets for help. Too little or too much detergent or sanitizer can actually be less effective!
- If relying on hot water for dish sanitizing, check water temperature frequently to ensure the water is getting hot enough.
- Do a walk-through inspection of your facility and storage areas daily.
- Clean and sanitize equipment after each use.

Chemical Storage

- Keep chemicals in a separate storage area, out of food preparation areas.
- Use chemicals safely so food products are not contaminated.
- Discard old chemicals as instructed on the label.

Facility Security Checklist

Facility Security

(Refer to Page 4)

Use these questions to evaluate your facility's security system.

1. Does the facility have an alarm system? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
2. Is the area surrounding the facility well lighted? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
3. Is the facility locked and secured when closed? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
4. Are keys to exterior doors/storage areas restricted to management? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
5. Are exterior doors, other than customer entrances, locked at all times? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____

Facility Employees

(Refer to Page 5)

Evaluate your hiring practices by answering these questions.

1. Are new employees' work references, contact information, immigration status and background checks reviewed and verified? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
2. Are personal items restricted to non-food handling areas? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
3. Is employee access restricted to only areas necessary for their job? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
4. Is management alert for unusual behavior, i.e. workers staying after shift ends, accessing areas outside their responsibility, etc.? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
5. Have staff been instructed to watch for unusual activities? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
6. Have employees been trained in security procedures? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
7. Are non-employees, restricted from food storage/prep areas? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
8. Are cleaning crews, contractors or other non-facility personnel prohibited from unsupervised food storage/prep areas? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____

Receiving Supplies

(Refer to Page 6)

Prevent serving a problem to your customers by evaluating your products.

1. Are foods received from reputable wholesalers/distributors? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
2. Are all deliveries received while facility staff is present? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
3. Are delivery people prohibited from entering unsupervised food storage/prep areas? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____

4. Once received, are foods immediately moved a secure storage area? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
5. Are deliveries matched against order invoices prior to acceptance? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
6. Are deliveries inspected for damage/tampering/counterfeiting? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____

Food Preparation & Holding

(Refer to Page 7)

How food is prepared and held in an establishment has great impact on the end result, both in quality and safety.

1. Are there procedures in place outlining the steps for each job and are they followed every time? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
2. Before using an ingredient, do employees inspect the food and its packaging for evidence of tampering? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
3. Are temperature measuring devices calibrated regularly? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
4. Are thermometers routinely used to measure food temperatures? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
5. During prep, are foods thoroughly cooked to required temps? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
6. Are cold foods kept at or below 41°F, hot foods at or above 135°F? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
7. Is a "no bare hand contact" policy in effect and enforced? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
8. Are gloves changed periodically and/or after certain tasks? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____

Self-Service Areas

(Refer to Page 8)

Self-service areas represent perhaps the highest deliberate contamination risk in a retail food store.

1. Are self-service stations visible by employees at all times? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
2. When replenishing self-service stations, are empty food pans/containers removed and replaced by new containers? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____

Cleaning

(Refer to Page 9)

Proper cleaning and sanitizing helps prevent any contamination from residual food or bacteria from getting into your product.

1. Are sanitizers used according to recommended applications? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
2. Is hot water for sanitizing checked for required temperatures? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____
3. Does management perform a daily walk-through to ensure the operation is ready to start and all cleaning is properly completed? YES NO
ACTION NEEDED: _____

Important Numbers:

Regional Department of Agriculture & Markets Office

Local Police

Poison Control

George E. Pataki, Governor
State of New York

Nathan L. Rudgers, Commissioner
New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets
10B Airline Drive, Albany, NY 12235

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