

Cooling Policy

Perhaps you have been running restaurants for twenty years. Or maybe you just graduated from a prestigious culinary school. You know what you're doing. So why did you still get a cooling violation?

Maybe it's time to create a cooling policy, so you can ensure that your employees know what to check, when to check it, and what to do if something isn't right.

First of all, what is a policy and how do you create a cooling policy for your food establishment?

A policy is a defined set of actions that minimize food safety risks. Although some small food establishments may have verbal policies, it is best to write your policies down.

Here are the key steps to consider when developing any policy:

- **Include the key people at the table**
- **Identify the most important steps in your processes**
- **Ensure that your policy includes corrective actions**
- **Revise the policy based on problems that arise, or as your food processes change**

Let's look at each of these steps more closely.

When writing your policy, make sure you are including the key people in your establishment, and also consider which staff members may be involved in each step. Who is your Certified Food Manager? Who specifically conducts cooling? Do you have multiple shift leads who oversee your establishment throughout the day? If your establishment is part of a national chain that has uniform standards, you may want to include a regional manager or Quality Assurance personnel in writing your cooling policy.

Now let's take a closer look at the second point. Where in your establishment could a cooling issue arise?

Preparation

Review various menu items that are prepared in your establishment. Consider which products are hot prepared and cold prepared. Defining this will ultimately determine the time frame and techniques needed to properly cool the product.

Cooling

Consider when, where and how hot food and cold prepped food are cooled. Does your facility prepare large amounts of sauces and soups? Would ice wands and deep ice baths be necessary? Does your facility prepare smaller batches of hot food? What type of containers should you utilize? Always ensure that the shallowest container possible is employed and maintained uncovered for the duration of the cooling process. When cooling cold prepped items think about when they will be utilized for service. Do you need it immediately or for later time? This will determine what refrigeration might be necessary to cool.

Assembly

When menu items containing time/temperature control for safety (TCS) food is assembled, look at how long the food is outside of refrigeration. Consider assembling small amounts more frequently, or packing on ice to maintain cold holding temperatures.

Ask these questions for each of these operations:

Who is responsible?

Who is working with hot TCS food and cold prepared food? Who oversees the process? Who is responsible for execution?

What needs to happen?

Hot TCS food shall be cooled from 135°F to 70°F within 2 hours, and from 70°F to 41°F within 4 hours. Cold prepped items need to cool from 70°F to 41°F within 4 hours.

When does it take place?

Think about usual preparation times. Is a lot of food made early morning or late at night and then cooled.



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Where does it occur?

Include all cold holding units, refrigeration units and ice bath areas where cooling is conducted.

How is this achieved?

This is where you can incorporate logs and documentation. Sample logs are provided as part of our toolbox. You may want to include steps about how thermometers are used and how staff will document temperatures.

As you review these key operational steps, consider whether it would make sense in your business model to write several policies for cooling. For example, you might write one policy for checking that equipment is working properly, and another to address staff behavior (e.g. utilizing deep, covered containers for cooling).

Now for the corrective actions. This is the “what if...” step. What if something goes wrong? Your policy should state what actions are taken if the cooling parameters are not met during the process. You can include a space for writing in corrective actions on your logs.

But don't stop here! Your cooling policy is a living document, and will change over time. When you discover areas of non-compliance in your establishment, use them as opportunities to improve, and return to your policy to incorporate the changes. In this way, you will continue to improve.

To summarize, here are the key steps to consider with any policy:

- **Include the key people at the table**
- **Identify the most important steps in your processes**
- **Check that your policy answers the questions: who, what, when, where, why and how**
- **Ensure that your policy includes corrective actions**
- **Revise the policy based on problems that arise, or as your food processes change**

Remember, if you don't train your employees on your cooling policy, it won't do much to help your establishment. Check out the next document, a Manager's Guide to training your employees.