

Ensuring Safety of Food Prepared and Transported for Service

Time and temperature abuses of potentially hazardous foods are the leading cause of foodborne illness in the United States according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. To ensure food safety, it is essential to control holding times and temperatures of these foods during transport and before sale. Children and senior citizens, who are more at risk of contracting diseases, consume the majority of these transported potentially hazardous foods.

The California Uniform Retail Food Facilities Law (CURFFL) has very specific requirements for handling potentially hazardous foods. In general, potentially hazardous foods must be maintained at or below 41¹ degrees F or at or above 140 degrees F at all times. This includes during transportation between a restaurant or central kitchen and the facility receiving prepared food for service up to the time the food is served. Anyone using time as a public health control for potentially hazardous foods must be operating under a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) plan that has been approved by the enforcement agency.

Temperature control during transportation is essential. Potentially hazardous foods should be transported under refrigeration or in containers designed for hot holding. If refrigeration during transport is provided using ice, be sure that the ice is made from potable water and is sufficient in quantity to maintain appropriate temperatures. Consideration must be given to local outdoor temperatures, the quantity of food held, and the travel and holding time when estimating the amount of ice required. In some cases, ice may not be sufficient and mechanical refrigeration will be necessary. Approved insulated containers must be used when refrigerating food with ice. It is important that ice melt be drained continuously so that food is not sitting in water. Ice in contact with food containers may not be used in beverages. Hot foods should be transported in approved insulated containers or hot holding cabinets designed to maintain 140 degrees F or higher for extended periods.

CURFFL requires that food be inspected upon receipt. Even though transporters are required to transport foods in a safe and sanitary manner, it is the responsibility of the recipient to inspect for damage and check temperatures when food is delivered. Potentially hazardous foods that are delivered at temperatures outside of established specifications must be evaluated for safety before acceptance. Unless an approved HACCP plan (using time as a public health control) is in place and can be monitored, established corrective action must be taken when food is received at temperatures outside of accepted limits. Appropriate equipment for hot or cold holding at appropriate temperatures must be provided at the remote facility if the food is not served immediately. When time is used as a public health control, any food remaining at the end of the approved holding period must be discarded. Travel time is included in holding time. Leftovers may not be refrigerated or reheated for later use.

¹ Milk and dairy foods may be held at 45 degrees F.