

Alternative Cooking Requirements for Comminuted Beef at McDonald's Restaurants

The *Lauren Beth Rudolph Food Safety Act of 1997* (California Uniform Retail Food Facilities Law (CURFFL) Section 113996) provides that the Department of Health Services may authorize meat cooking procedures which differ from those contained in Section 113996 when such cooking methods provide equivalent levels of food safety.

The **McDonald's**® Corporation, has petitioned the Department to issue alternative cook time and temperature requirements for **McDonald's** hamburger patties and **Quarter-pounder** patties. Section 113996(a)(1) of CURFFL requires comminuted meat, or any food containing comminuted meat, to be heated to a minimum internal temperature of 155 degrees F for 15 seconds or 157 degrees F. However, **McDonald's** has developed a proprietary cook method using a clamshell grill which, when followed, thoroughly cooks hamburger patties on both sides simultaneously. Extensive testing by **McDonald's** has shown that hamburgers cooked according to this method receive a process that exceeds the bacterial lethality provided by the statutory parameters. Factors such as measurement error, meat variation, and heating characteristics of the clamshell grill may result in some patties that are below 155 degrees F. when measured after cooking. This alternative applies only when comminuted meat is cooked on the clamshell grill.

McDonald's restaurants must meet the following requirements for cooking comminuted meat on their clamshell grills:

Follow all steps in the **McDonald's** cooking process including;

1. Pre-heat grill to appropriate temperature,
2. Scrape cook surfaces,
3. Use **McDonald's** approved beef patties,
4. Cook for the prescribed amount of time,
5. Hold for the prescribed amount of time after cooking and prior to temperature measurement,
6. Check for visible appearance of cooked patties (absence of red color in meat, clear juices.)
7. Maintain grill calibration records for temperature measurements and corrective actions (grill adjustments.)
8. Check that the average of all patty temperatures as measured during calibration are above 155 degrees F unless corrective actions are taken and recorded.
9. Check that the grill has been properly "gapped" to provide full contact with all patties on both sides of the grill (no warping).

If all of the steps in the **McDonald's** grilling procedure are being followed, you may be assured that hamburger patties are fully cooked to be free of pathogenic bacteria even though some recorded temperatures may be below 155 degrees F. Terminal patty temperatures may not be indicative of temperatures achieved during the process. Test results submitted by **McDonald's** and verified by the United States Department of Agriculture, Food Safety Inspection Service, show that the **McDonald's** cook procedure provides sufficient integrated lethality to assure safe food.