Food Safety Fact Sheet

Salvaging Food after a Flood

Here Are the Facts

The school nutrition manager is responsible for taking actions to ensure the safety of food following an emergency such as a flood. The manager is responsible for checking all food for exposure to flood waters, discarding food that may have been damaged, and cleaning and sanitizing packages of food that can be salvaged. If a school has been required to close its kitchen due to a flood, it should not re-open until it has been authorized to do so by a local or state regulatory authority.

Introduction

Flood waters can damage many foods in a school nutrition operation, but some foods can be salvaged. School nutrition employees need to know what foods can be safely salvaged and how to salvage those foods. Using proper salvaging methods will save money while maintaining the safety of the food served.

Determine Food to Keep after Flooding

- Discard any food that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with flood water. Food containers that are not waterproof include those with screw-caps, snap lids, pull tops, and crimped caps (like those on carbonated beverage bottles). Also, discard cardboard juice/milk/baby formula boxes because they cannot be effectively cleaned and sanitized.
- Inspect canned foods or foods packaged in retort pouches and discard any that are damaged. Damage is shown by swelling, leakage, punctures, holes, fractures, extensive deep rusting, and crushing/denting severe enough to prevent normal stacking or opening with a manual, wheel-type can opener.

Steps to Salvage All-Metal Cans and Retort Pouches

If cans or pouches are not damaged:

1. Remove labels because they can harbor dirt and bacteria. Brush or wipe away dirt or silt.
2. Wash the cans or retort pouches thoroughly with soap and water, using hot water if it is available.
3. Transfer label information such as product name, expiration date, and manufacturer to the can using a permanent marker.
4. Rinse the cans or retort pouches with potable water (water that is safe for drinking).
5. Sanitize the cans or pouches by immersing for 15 minutes in a freshly made solution consisting of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of potable water.
6. Air-dry cans or retort pouches for a minimum of 1 hour before opening or storing. If possible use sanitized wire shelving or other method that allows complete air circulation for drying.
7. Use the food in the reconditioned cans or retort pouches as soon as possible.

Remember, never taste food to determine its safety.

When in Doubt, Throw it Out!

References

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- Food Safety and Inspection Service. (2007). *A consumer's guide to food safety: Severe storms & hurricanes.* Available online at www.fsis.usda.gov/pdf/severe_storms_and_hurricanes_guide.pdf

National Food Service Management Institute
The University of Mississippi
P.O. Drawer 188
University, MS 38677-0188
www.nfsmi.org

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