

Date Marking & Donated Food: A new guide for Food Banks, Soup Kitchens and Pantries

Background: As of March 1, 2022, all food establishments must follow new date-marking guidelines to limit the risk of pathogen growth in prepared TCS (Time/Temperature Controlled for Safety) foods that are stored under refrigeration. The information in this guide will help you to adjust your food receiving practices to ensure the safest food possible for your clients.

Refrigerated, ready to eat, TCS Foods prepared and held in your establishment must be clearly marked to indicate the date by which the food must be consumed or discarded when held at a temperature of 41°F or less:

- Foods that are made from scratch in your facility or another kitchen, including permitted restaurants and grocery stores throughout the state.
- Foods that are assembled and repackaged for sale or donation in your facility or another permitted donor kitchen.
- Commercially prepared foods that have been opened or repackaged and stored in your facility or another permitted donor kitchen.

The date by which they must be discarded is within 7 days or less of the date the packaging was opened, or the food was prepared. The day it is prepared or opened counts as Day 1.

Best Practices for Food Banks and Pantries:

- ✓ All commercially prepared refrigerated, ready-to-eat TCS foods that you receive from grocery rescue should be in their original, fully intact packaging to avoid a requirement to date-mark or discard them.
- ✓ Clarify the donating establishment's system for marking their foods, whether using the 'prepared date' or the 'expiration date' to mark packages so that you can verify the actual age of the foods received.
- ✓ Any refrigerated, ready-to-eat TCS foods that have been prepared in a permitted food establishment must have the prepared-date marked on them by the establishment that made or otherwise repackaged the food itself. *Your facility will be responsible for discarding the food within 7 days from preparation date if necessary.*
- ✓ Keep any ready-to-eat TCS foods that have been prepared in a permitted food establishment frozen to extend their shelf-life for your clients- pause counting days once the food is frozen solid and start again where you left off once food has been thawed.

Best Practices for Soup Kitchens and Meal Programs:

- ✓ Any donated or purchased commercial products should be kept in their original, unopened packaging until it is time to prepare them.
- ✓ Once foods have been prepared freeze or serve them quickly to avoid any waste.
- ✓ When mixing ingredients from different sources, the prepared date that is marked on the food container should reflect the oldest date for any foods included.
- ✓ Any foods that are found to exceed the date on their container can be cooked to above 165°F and served immediately to avoid discarding them.

Make your own plan by utilizing this resource from WA DOH: [Date Marking Toolkit](#)