



Date Marking- Understanding the Requirement

What is date marking and how is it used? Date marking is a way to ensure that food is still safe to use. It is also the law. Date marking is an identification system for ready-to-eat, time/temperature control for safety food held for more than 24 hours, so you know how old it is. The system identifies when the food is to be discarded.

How do I know if a food needs to be date marked? If you answer “yes” to all 5 of these questions, then the food must be date marked.

1. Does the food require refrigeration?
2. If commercially packaged, has the original package been opened?
3. Is the food ready to eat? Could this food be eaten right now? Examples include cold cooked beef and cold pizza.
4. Is the food a time/temperature control for safety food? Will it grow disease-causing bacteria if left unrefrigerated? (If you are not sure, call the Health Department.)
5. Will the food be in the establishment for more than 24 hours? This counts even if the food is, or will be, mixed with something else to create a new product.

When to discard? At a maximum of 41° F, you must discard the food within 7 days. The day you open the package or prepare the food is Day 1. Add 6 days to Day 1 to obtain the correct discard date.

Does an establishment that goes through food very fast need to date mark? Any food not used or discarded within 24 hours must provide a date mark on the item.

What if you freeze the food? Freezing food “stops” the date marking clock, but does not reset it. So, if a food is stored at 41° F for 2 days and then frozen, it can still be used for 5 more days when it begins to thaw. The freezing date and the thawing date need to be put on the container along with the new discard date.

What if I mix the food with something else? When foods are mixed together, the date of the oldest food item becomes the new discard date.

Examples

- Food opened or prepared on the 17th should be discarded on the 23rd.
- Food opened or prepared on the 1st should be discarded on the 7th.
- Food opened or prepared on the 8th should be discarded on the 14th.