

## **Guidelines for Food Establishments Addressing Food Service Refrigeration in Hot Weather**

Date: 08.21.2023

Extreme heat conditions place additional burden on condenser coils of food storage refrigerators and freezers. This additional workload can result in breakdowns and failure of the food storage unit to maintain the proper temperature for safe food storage.

The following guiding principles will help prevent breakdown of refrigeration units and keep food safe for the public.

- Practice regular preventative maintenance
  - Clean the cooling coils, check the discharge lines, maintain fluid levels, and keep the fan free of obstructions to allow units to function e Practice regular preventative maintenance
  - Clean the cooling coils, check the discharge lines, maintain fluid levels, and keep the fan free of obstructions to allow units to function efficiently while working harder during extreme heat.
  - Train staff NOT to hold doors open for deliveries or any other reason.
  - Open doors in hot weather causes food temperatures to rise rapidly and forces equipment to work harder to catch up.
- Pay attention to location of refrigeration units
  - Locate refrigeration units away from sunny windows and in the coolest part of the facility.
  - Place refrigerators and freezers in a space where air conditioning creates a buffer zone against the heat.
  - Commercial refrigeration units should have generous clearance on all sides to allow heat generated to dissipate and provide access to coils and drain hoses for cleaning.
- Plan for power loss of a system breakdown
  - Demands on the power grid in the hot weather can cause rolling power outages, which may prevent commercial refrigerators from maintaining safe temperatures.
  - With a system breakdown or complete power failure, keep doors closed and move as many items as possible into a freezer or other cold storage right away to help keep food cooler and safe.
  - Any perishable food which has been above 41°F for more than 4 hours should be discarded.
- Set all refrigeration units to the correct temperatures
  - At 40°F food enters the “danger zone” of 40-140°F, when bacteria growth is rapid, doubling every 20 minutes.
  - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires restaurant refrigerators to be at 40°F or below.
  - To keep temperatures at 40°F, most commercial refrigerators are set at 38°F.
  - Setting the temperature at 38°F offers a buffer before food enters the “danger zone”.
- Implement a temperature monitoring system

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- Use a temperature log or system that monitors current unit and food temperatures to track temperature history.
- This temperature monitoring system should alert staff to problems instantly and allow staff to see trends that can indicate failing equipment before it stops functioning.
- This temperature monitoring system should show staff how the equipment is keeping up in the heat.

Remember that food establishment workers can become quickly overheated when working in mobile units and kitchens leading to not only heat related health conditions including heat stress and heat stroke but injuries and accidents. To prevent worker health issues, consider placement of additional portable air conditioner units, encourage hydration, and rotate staff out of hot areas for cooling.