

Teach, train, test, repeat — food safety refreshers a must

By [David Walpuck](#) | April 27, 2016



Knowing the correct answer for a food safety certification test is not the same as knowing how to properly use a food thermometer. On-site follow-up training ensures that classroom learning is retained and implemented.

It's just human nature ... people forget.

Consequently, unless food handlers receive proper followup reviews and reinforcement, retention of food safety protocols and procedures is unlikely.

To ensure that classroom content becomes part of their daily routine, employers must monitor, document and refresh the training messages. Food handlers need to understand there is sense of urgency and real consequences for real people or they likely won't retain and implement proper food safety protocols in their work environments.

To simply pass a test and not institute the knowledge taught in class about health and sanitation defeats the purpose of the training. And, after time, the information ceases to be retrievable for most people.

Management should coach and reinforce the proper practices while disclosing to employees the risks and true liability of failing to execute the practices taught in training session. Simply instructing food handlers to keep cold food cold and hot food hot isn't enough.

Far too often the boundaries of the temperature danger zone get blurred when food handlers are not taking temperature readings — sometimes because they don't have access to an operable calibrated thermometer — or are not held accountable for documenting and reporting those

readings. For example, 41°F and 135° F may be the correct answers on a given Tuesday, but food handlers need to understand the importance of getting the same readings next Sunday as well.

Other detriments to food safety and knowledge retention include:



Color-coded cutting boards can help ensure that fresh produce is not cross-contaminated with pathogens from raw meat. To increase compliance with such food safety policies and procedures, employers must provide continuing education and training for food handlers.

A lack of general training — More often than not, that 18-year-old, part-time employee gets thrown into the work schedule well before they understand the basics of food safety. Then, instead of instilling a regimen of following policies that will keep them compliant and customers safe, management will let the negative behaviors slide because they need a warm body, not a well-trained employee. Said employee is a food handler, not a microbiologist, train them as such.

It is not a priority — Too many times neither management nor employees take food safety policies seriously. For some individuals it can be too much information. For some companies more consideration is given to food costs, inventory levels and merchandising, which are important, but so is proper hand washing.

Lack of financial resources — Teaching food safety and getting a food handler certified costs money and if a retailer is suffering financially, many things get cut, including labor hours, over-time pay, equipment maintenance and, yes, training classes.

Turnover — In the retail food industry, it's rampant. Employers must keep up with it, manage it and budget for it. The individual you certified and trained yesterday is going to work for one of your competitors today. Sometimes it is because of money, working conditions or opportunity for advancement. But, sometimes it's because people feel neglected that they were not trained properly and standards are not being met.

Multitasking — Employers sometimes stretch the capacity of the employees. If the schedule is thin, the responsibilities increased, sometimes excessively.

Laws of Certification — In some regulatory jurisdictions, only one person in the establishment needs to be certified during operating hours or processing. The thought being, why certify more food handlers, we are covered by complying with the law with just one. However, some locations have hundreds of employees and serve thousands of people. Is that one person really enough?

Language/Physical Barriers — While some food safety certifications are offered in different languages, on-site operational directions in regard to food safety are generally given in English. If a food handler has an issue regarding sight or some other physical ailment, they should obviously not be discriminated against and an accommodation should be made for food safety certification. However, if a food handler cannot take and pass a food safety examination, how can they accurately read an ingredient label or have the dexterity to handle a thermometer? These situations need to be handled with tact and planning.

Food handlers need to be food safety certified, however, responsibility reaches further than just passing the test.

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