

**MODEL GUIDELINE**

**for**

**FOOD SAFETY**

**IN FOOD BANKS**

First Edition

Prepared by the Federal/Provincial/Territorial  
Committee on Food Safety Policy

October 6, 1999

**FORWARD:**

This “Model Guideline for Food Safety in Food Banks” is a revision of an original document prepared in Saskatchewan in 1992 which was provided to the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Committee on Food Safety Policy (FPTCFSP). It has been subsequently reformatted and altered by the FPTCFSP. It has received national review from community food providers (food banks), Environmental Health Officers throughout the country and all levels of government.

Providing a safe food supply for our community is the goal for all involved in this process. This guideline can be used as a resource for both new and existing food banks. Everyone involved in creating this guideline has acknowledged the need for a reference document to assist food banks with their operations.

Food banks are unique in that they have different needs than other food service/retail premises. Food banks rely mainly on donations and that raises a variety of issues such as:

- Varying sources of food.
- History of the food may be unknown.
- Questions arise relating to how and how long was the food stored?
- Constantly changing volunteer and food bank staff make training difficult.

The materials contained in this guideline are to be used as a tool for food bank operations.

**Note: As provincial and municipal regulations respecting foods vary from province to province, it is necessary for food banks to ensure that they are in compliance with local food safety and health regulations.**

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## **A. Introduction**

In recent years, food banks have been established in order to meet a very important need: to provide adequate amounts of nutritious food to people not having sufficient means to purchase it themselves. Hunger in children is of particular concern. Without adequate nutritious food their development and learning potential is jeopardised. It is also widely recognized that if hunger is left unattended, dire social consequences will result.

While it is important to feed the hungry, it is equally important to ensure that food distributed to the hungry is safe to consume. Indeed, public health legislation prohibits unsafe food from being offered or sold to the public. Unfortunately, the objective of offering the safest food possible may at times differ from the objective of providing the most food possible. Clearly, a balance should be struck. The following guideline is intended to assist food banks in striking this important balance without compromising acceptable safety precautions associated with handling and distribution of food.

## **B. Definitions**

**“food bank”** means a not-for-profit organization that accepts donated food and operates with the exclusive intent of feeding the hungry, and receives, holds, packages, repackages or distributes food to be consumed off the premises, but does not process or serve food.

**“local authority”** means a competent local authority such as a health unit, regional health authority, municipal or provincial department or agency which regulates food facilities in the area.

**“process”** means to make raw foods ready-to-eat and includes washing, rinsing, cooking, smoking, salting, canning, freezing, pasteurising, and reprocessing of previously processed food.

**“soup kitchen”** means a not for profit organisation that operates with the exclusive intent of feeding the hungry, and receives, holds and processes food to be served or consumed on the premises.

## **C. Application of Guidelines**

These guidelines apply to food banks, but not to soup kitchens or similar facilities where food is for consumption on-site.

Some food banks may conduct on-site kitchen workshops and training seminars to teach clients how to cook nutritious and inexpensive meals. Health agencies support these innovative approaches that foster self-reliance. While the guideline does not apply to this aspect of the food bank operation, the appropriate local authority should be contacted prior to establishing such a program. They will provide advice on the facilities and equipment required, and they are in a position to provide safe food handling instruction.

## **D. General Principles/Recommended Practices**

Regardless of which food-type (see Section E) the food bank handles, the following principles and recommended practices should be followed:

### **1. Construction/Maintenance of Physical Facilities**

For new operations, the physical facility should be reviewed with the local authority that can provide advice on its appropriateness, and tips on improvements to ensure the safe handling of food.

- Floors, walls and ceilings should be cleanable and kept in good repair.
- There should be adequate lighting in hand washing areas, toilet rooms, and in areas where food or food ingredients are examined, sorted or stored, and utensils are cleaned. Lights should be shielded in order to protect against broken glass falling onto unpackaged food.
- Food banks should have adequate ventilation to prevent condensation falling onto food or food preparation surfaces.
- Food should not be stored under plumbing pipes or other pipes that could leak its contents or condensation onto food or food preparation surfaces.
- All food products should be stored on pallets or shelves at least 15 cm (6") above the floor to prevent contamination.
- Food banks should have potable hot and cold running water for cleaning and hand washing.

## **2. Equipment and Utensils**

Equipment, utensils and surfaces that come in direct contact with food should be of non-toxic, non-corrosive materials and should be hard and smooth so as to be easily cleaned. Equipment should be installed and maintained for ease of cleaning, and kept in good repair.

Utensils and food contact surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned and where necessary sanitized prior to use. This is done by first washing with clean hot water and an effective detergent. The item should then be rinsed well with clean hot water to remove detergent and any loose dirt or food particles, and then sanitized. Sanitizing is conducted by immersing the utensil in a sanitizing solution or alternatively, larger equipment, such as counter tops, can be sanitized by spraying the sanitizer solution on the equipment with a spray bottle.

A sanitizing solution for dishwashing by hand or surface sanitizing can be made by mixing:

**15 ml (½ ounce or one tablespoon) of chlorine bleach in 4 litres (one gallon) of water (or equivalent) makes a 100 ppm sanitizing solution.**

The local authority can provide additional information regarding different methods of sanitizing and preparation of sanitizing solutions.

- Equipment and utensils should be air dried after sanitizing.
- All other surfaces or equipment should be cleaned at such intervals as necessary, but always before and after being in direct contact with food.
- Equipment and utensils should be handled and stored in a manner that protects them from contamination.
- All single service articles (disposable paper/plastic cutlery, etc.) should be used only once.
- Packaging material should be designed for food use.

## **3. Personal Hygiene**

All employees or volunteers that work in direct contact with food (e.g., repackaging) should:

- maintain a high degree of personal cleanliness,
- wear clean outer garments and suitable hair restraint,

- wash their hands and exposed portions of their arms thoroughly in a conveniently located hand-washing facility before starting work, after using the toilet and as often as may be necessary including, after smoking, eating, or handling raw meat or poultry,
- not eat food, drink beverages or use tobacco in any form in areas where food is exposed or in areas used for washing equipment or utensils.

No person should work in the food bank while ill with a disease communicable through food. Operators of food banks should be particularly vigilant for persons with symptoms such as diarrhoea, vomiting, jaundice, or infected cuts/boils.

#### **4. Protecting Food from Contamination**

Food should be protected from physical, chemical, or microbiological contamination at all times. All potentially hazardous foods (see Section E) should be maintained at a safe temperature of less than 4°C (40° F) or greater than 60°C (140° F).

Cooked and ready-to-eat foods should be separate from raw foods of vegetable or animal origin, during their storage and handling so as to prevent contamination.

To ensure that potentially hazardous food is not temperature abused, the following temperatures should be maintained:

- **refrigeration storage temperatures**                      **4°C (40°F) or less**
- **frozen food temperature**                                      **-18°C (0°F) or less**

Potentially hazardous food should not be permitted to remain in the Danger Zone (between 4°C to 60°C) for any longer than 2 hours. If potentially hazardous foods remain in the Danger Zone for a total time period of any longer than 2 hours, it should be discarded.

Poisonous and toxic materials should be identified and handled so that they will not contaminate food or constitute a hazard to employees or volunteer help. Caution should be exercised when repackaging detergents. This should be done in a separate area from where food is exposed.

When repackaging detergents each container (not the lid) should be clearly labelled with the ingredients so that there is no chance of confusing its contents with food.

## **5. Labelling**

When repackaging foods it is critical that ingredient lists are placed on the repackaged products because there are increasing numbers of people with food allergies or sensitivities. It is particularly critical to identify products that contain nuts, nut products, or other potential allergens.

If the product that is being repackaged has a '*best before*' date this date should be transferred to the repackaged item.

## **6. Salvageable Food**

Before carrying out the salvage operation, the local authority or Health Canada should be consulted to determine whether the food is salvageable. Salvaging food should be carried out following an acceptable protocol.

Frozen foods need to be carefully examined to ensure that they have not been thawed and refrozen.

Salvageable food should be properly stored and separated from non-salvageable food to prevent contamination of the food available for distribution.

Food donated from flood, fire, smoke, power interruptions, etc. can be contaminated and generally should not be accepted. It can be very difficult to determine the damage to the food by looking at it.

## **7. Sanitary Facilities and Controls**

Food banks should be provided with adequate toilet facilities, conveniently located hand washing facilities with potable hot and cold running water and liquid soap in a dispenser and single service towelling or hand air dryers. Toilet rooms should be ventilated by mechanical means or an openable window. Toilet rooms and fixtures should be kept clean and in good repair at all times.

## **8. Garbage and Refuse**

All refuse should be kept in leak-proof, non-absorbent containers and should be kept covered with tight fitting lids when stored or not in continuous use. Adequate cleaning facilities should be provided and each container room or area should be thoroughly cleaned after the emptying or removal of refuse.



All refuse should be disposed of frequently and in such a manner so as to prevent contamination of any food product and surrounding processing areas. Containers and rooms should be protected against the entry of insects, rodents and other pests.

Garbage and refuse storage facilities should be kept in an area separate from food that is to be distributed.

### **9. Insect, Rodent and Animal Control**

Effective measures should be taken to prevent entry by rodents, insects, pests and other animals from entering the food bank. The only animals, which should be permitted in a food bank, are assistance or service animals.

Only pesticides labelled for use in food premises should be used in food bank areas where food is handled.

All food should be protected from pesticide spray. Open foods should not be present during spraying. Equipment should be covered during spraying. Any equipment or counters, etc., that have been exposed to spray, directly or indirectly, need to be washed after spraying before they are used again.

Pesticides should only be used in a manner that will not contaminate food or food contact services and should only be used by qualified personnel.

### **10. Vehicles**

Vehicles used to transport food should be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition to protect food from contamination. All foods should be covered and protected during transport. Use clean containers/packaging for transporting (i.e. boxes for canned food). Ensure appropriate temperatures are maintained. Care should also be taken to ensure that a vehicle that may be used for transporting refuse or other items that could contaminate food, is not used to transport food, unless thoroughly cleaned before using.

Potentially hazardous foods should be transported at the appropriate temperature (4 degrees Celsius or less or frozen -18 degrees Celsius or less) and care should be taken to ensure that the food is not temperature abused. (See Section 4).

## **11. Employee Volunteer Training**

To minimize the risk of distributing unsafe foods, it is very important that employees or volunteers are properly trained, especially those individuals who make decisions about which foods are safe for distributing; who handle potentially hazardous foods; or who are involved in repackaging of foods.

Trainers should be experienced food bank workers; staff from food processing or retail stores with knowledge of food safety; or staff from the local authority. Information is available from your local authority on issues such as assessing the safety of dented canned foods. (See appendix on Canned Foods.)

The food bank manager, permanent employees or key volunteers who are present on a regular basis are encouraged to complete a recognized food handler training program. Contact your local authority for courses in your area.

## **12. Public and Client Information**

It is important that food banks educate the public about the preferred types of foods that should be donated (pre-packaged foods, commercially canned goods, fresh produce, meat and other foods from approved commercial sources, etc.). It is also important that appropriate food safety information is readily available for clients, particularly if some of the food in their hamper is of a higher risk (e.g. potentially hazardous food).

## **E. Food-type Categories**

A food bank operator can make decisions when deciding whether or not to accept a donated food, which can reduce the risk of distributing unsafe food products. The following four categories will assist food bank operators in determining the relative risks associated with each type of food handled and provide guidance on what precautions should be taken. Category 1 food is viewed as having the lowest risk. Each of the remaining categories has progressively higher relative risks associated with them.

### **Category 1 Non-perishable Foods**

This category includes non-perishable foods (items that do not require refrigeration) for example; pre-packaged foods, canned products and dry goods such as flour, sugar, pasta, breads and pastries (without cream or meat fillings).

**Precautions:**

- Of particular importance in this category is sorting and selection of cans that may not be safe for consumption. Cans should be free from rust, pitting, and dents especially at the rim and seam. Leaking or swollen cans should not be used and should be disposed in the garbage. Training is important in assessing the safety of canned goods showing any signs of damage. (See General Principles Section 11).
- Bulk packages that require dividing into smaller quantities and repackaging should be accompanied with adequate labelling (see General Principles Section 5).
- Some expiry dates are for safety reasons while others are for optimum quality of a product. As a rule, potentially hazardous foods (see Category 3) that exceed their expiry date, should not be consumed, while non-potentially hazardous foods such as cereals or pasta will need judgement on whether they should be distributed. Remember, “*If in doubt, throw it out*” or contact your local authority for advice.
- Commercial processors usually have 1-800 numbers for information on ‘*best before*’ dates which have been exceeded. It is very important that processors of baby food products and adult nutritional supplements be contacted for recommendations if this type of product should be used if the expiry date is past.

Contacts:	Gerber	1-800-443-7237
	Heinz	1-800-268-6641

- Baby food should only be in unopened and undamaged containers. If the safety of the can is in question contact the local authority or the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.
- Containers, including bottles and glass jars with screw caps or lids, press caps or pull rings that have been in contact with flood, sewer or fire suppression water should be discarded. Jars which have the seals broken (or the top has popped up) should be discarded.

**NOTE: Home canned foods, particularly meat, fish, vegetables and combination foods (e.g. Antipasto) should not be accepted due to the risk of botulism.**

### **Category 2 Low Hazard Perishable Foods**

Category 2 foods include low hazard perishable foods such as uncut raw fruit and vegetables.

#### **Precautions:**

- It is important that adequate refrigeration facilities be available for perishable foods.
- It is important that adequate attention be given to refuse storage facilities and frequent refuse removal. Partially spoiled produce can very quickly result in serious odour and fly problems if not handled promptly. Garbage should be stored in covered containers and be removed frequently.

**NOTE: Fruit and vegetables that have been sliced or have had their natural coating removed should be refrigerated (e.g. 4°C/40°F or less) or kept frozen.**

### **Category 3 Potentially Hazardous Foods**

Category 3 includes potentially hazardous foods (e.g. dairy products, egg and egg products, tofu products, meat and meat products and poultry) from a commercial processor, retailer or a permitted food service establishment. Check with your local authority for Category 3 foods that are approved for donations in your area.

#### **Precautions:**

- It is critical that potentially hazardous foods are kept at a temperature of 4°C (40°F) or less, both before they are donated and at the food bank. Accurate thermometers should be provided and used to check the temperature of potentially hazardous food when it is received and while it is being held at the food bank.
- Milk and milk products including cream and cream products, ice cream, frozen desserts, yogurt and similar foods should be pasteurized, held and distributed in their original unopened containers. Partially softened ice cream may be accepted from a reliable donor if the product is pasteurized and in the original unopened container.
- Meat and meat products should be held and distributed in the original unopened packages. Meat and meat products should be from a source approved by the local authority. If large pieces of meat have been donated and further processing is required (cutting into smaller portions), then the meat should be processed and packaged in an approved commercial establishment or in a food bank work area approved by the local authority. This area should

have appropriate equipment e.g. stainless steel equipment, large sinks for washing, rinsing and sanitizing and hand wash basins.

- Poultry and poultry products: if it is necessary to portion large birds then this should be treated similar to meat and meat products above. Precaution needs to be taken when handling poultry because of the risk of Salmonella contamination. Equipment, utensils and counters should be washed, rinsed and sanitized. Poultry and poultry products should be from a source approved by the local authority.

**NOTE: Check with your local authority for the requirements regarding handling meat and poultry products in your food bank.**

- All meat and poultry should be properly dressed and there should be no temperature abuse during storage and transportation.
- Processing and packaging of raw foods should take place in an area of the food bank separate from ready-to-eat foods in order to prevent cross contamination. Contact your local authority to review and approve this designated area.
- Packaging materials used for repackaging a product should be made of a material that will not contaminate the food product. New packaging should be used for foods that could be eaten without washing (e.g. fruit, vegetables, salad or bread products).
- If vacuum packaging equipment is available for repackaging, special precautions should be taken. If a food item that is vacuum-packaged is a potentially hazardous food it still should be kept refrigerated or frozen depending on the product. Your local authority can supply advice on storage practices.
- The adequate training of personnel responsible for additional processing of foods (e.g. cutting of meat and poultry or how to handle mouldy cheese products) is very important. Arrangements should be made with the local authority to provide safe food handling courses.
- Eggs and egg products should be refrigerated. Cracked eggs should not be distributed and should be discarded.

#### **Category 4 High Risk Foods**

This category includes food that has been processed in the home environment or food from any source that has been unsealed and/or partially used. These foods are viewed as being at highest risk because it is not known to what extent an open container of food has been contaminated or in the case of home processed foods, under what condition the food was

processed and stored. A food bank manager making the decision to handle and distribute this type of food should be aware that this food carries a higher risk. Depending on the extent of the hunger needs within a community, a food bank may be compelled to draw from this source of food in order to avert problems of serious malnutrition. If the decision is made to handle these types of foods, then the following precautions should be taken:

**Precautions:**

- Home preserves (jams, jellies and other high sugar content type foods) may be accepted as donations and distributed as long as the product is labelled, unopened (properly sealed) and contained in a proper container.

The following foods should **not** be accepted for distribution:

- Unpasteurized dairy products.
  - Home canned vegetables.
  - Home canned meat/fish products or combination i.e. antipasto.
  - Foods which are not in their original container.
- In some cases, freezers full of food are donated to food bank (for example, family members of a deceased person may donate the food from the estate). Extreme caution should be exercised in these circumstances. If the food bank client is capable of understanding that the food is from an unknown source and is willing to take special precautions at home (i.e. thorough cooking), then the manager may decide to give it to the client. Food should not be used if it looks like it has been thawed and re-frozen. If products are not identifiable then these foods should not be distributed. The local authority can provide advice on the suitability of these foods.
  - *In no case should home canned vegetables and home canned meat/fish be distributed to clients.*
  - Open and partially used foods regardless of whether they are from a commercial processor/retailer or from the home may pose a serious risk. Good judgement is required in deciding whether the food should be distributed. Large bags or containers of dry goods (flour, sugar, salt, dry cereal, etc.) may be repackaged, if the product is viewed as being acceptable. Repackaging is a critical aspect of the food bank operation and, therefore, should be done in proper facilities and by people who have received basic training in sanitation and food handling.

## **F. Mouldy Foods**

Some moulds produce mycotoxins that even in small amounts can be extremely harmful to human health.

The main body of a mould plant consists of a stalk, the portion above the food, which produces spores (seeds) and gives the mould its colour. The “roots” of the mould plant grow into the food and this is where the toxin is produced. Cooking does not necessarily destroy the toxins. The following foods should be discarded if they have signs of wild mould:

- Soft cheeses (such as Brie)
- Sour cream, yogurt, cottage cheese
- Bacon, hot dog, sliced luncheon meats
- Meat pies
- Open canned ham
- Most leftover foods
- Bread, cake, rolls, flour, pastry
- Peanuts and peanut butter
- Juices, berries
- Jams, jellies, syrups
- Cucumbers, tomatoes, spinach, lettuce or other leafy vegetables
- Bananas, peaches or melons
- Corn on the cob

Some more solid foods can be salvaged if they are trimmed at least one inch from the edge of mould. These include:

- Hard cheese (Cheddar, Swiss)
- Bell peppers, carrots, cabbage
- Broccoli, cauliflower, brussel sprouts, garlic onions
- Potatoes, turnips, zucchini
- Apples and pears

## **G. Special Category Foods**

Innovative programs may arise allowing additional volumes of food to be contributed to food banks. Special guidelines, in addition to this guideline may have to be developed by the local authority to address these new programs.

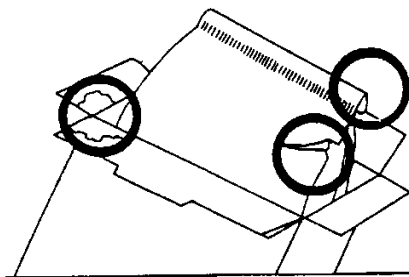
## **APPENDIX I**

### **Packaging Defects**



## Guidelines for Evaluating Boxed and Dry Packaged Containers

### BOXES WITH INNER BAG

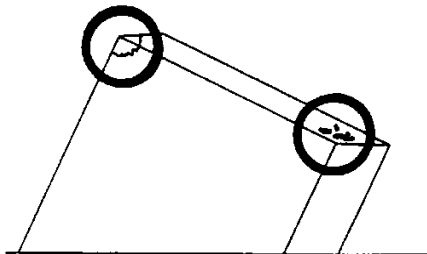


1. Look for contaminants on box
2. Look at inner bag—discard if it is
  - torn, leaking or contaminated
  - has imperfect or leaking seals
  - has moldy or foreign objects inside

#### TO SAVE GOOD INNER BAGS OF FOOD FROM DAMAGED BOX:

Place inner bag into a plastic  
and insert label.

### BOXES WITHOUT INNER BAG



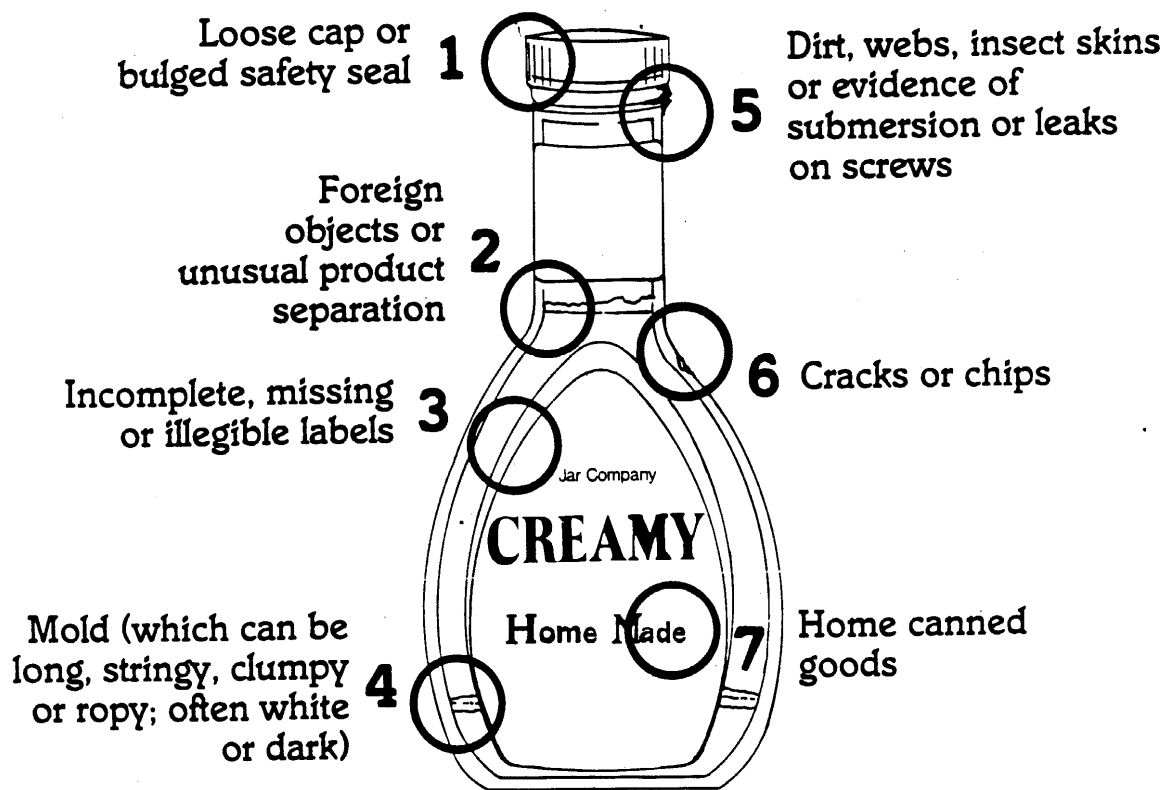
1. Do not use if opened
2. Look for contaminants on box
3. Look for insects, insect skins,  
webs, chaff or moving pieces

**WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!**



# Guidelines for Evaluating Glass Food Containers

## Discard Jars With:



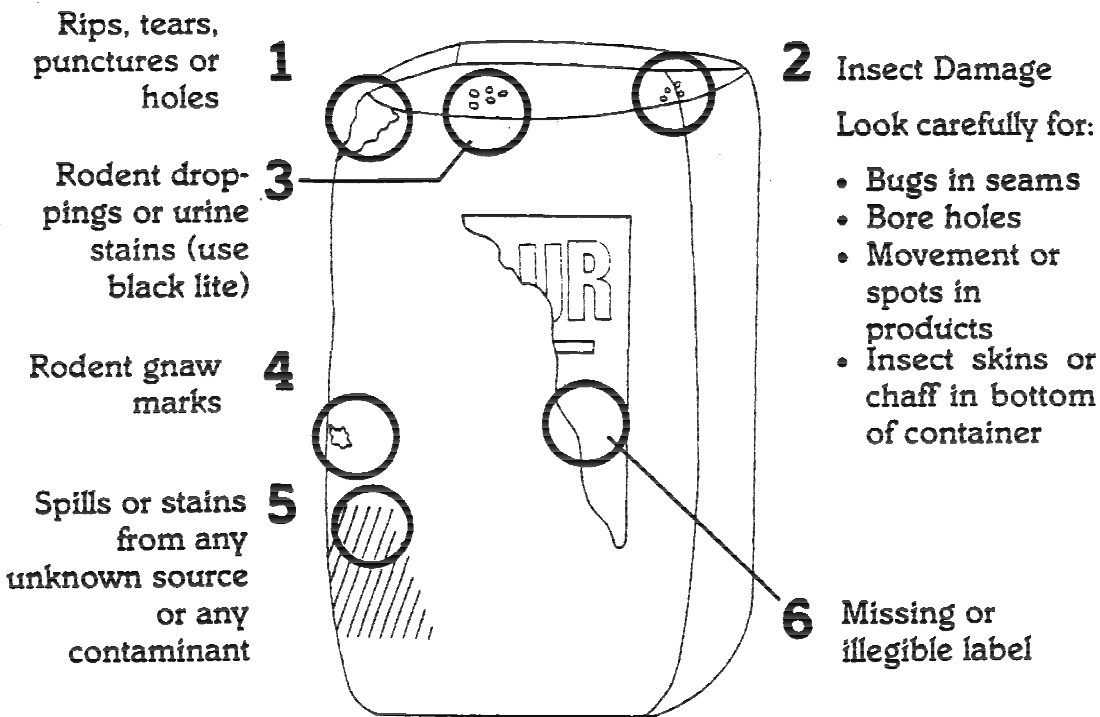
**IF IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!**



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# Guidelines for Evaluating Bagged and Sacked Food Containers

## DISCARD BAGS OR SACKS WITH:



**IF IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!**



## **APPENDIX II**

### **Can and Jar Defects**

## Serious Can Defects



Dented at junction  
of side and end



Sharp dent or  
dent on seam



Swollen or bulging



Pitted rust or  
leaking

Cans with any of these defects  
may be unsafe.  
*Discard them!*



Purdue University  
Cooperative Extension Service  
School of Consumer & Family Sciences

## Serious Jar Defects



Inner seal or tamper resistant tape missing or broken.



Dirt under the rim.



Crooked lid, vacuum button raised, other evidence that cap has been opened.



Leaking, crack or chips, or product discolored.

Jars with any of these defects  
may be unsafe.  
*Discard them!*



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Cooperative Extension Service  
School of Consumer & Family Sciences

**APPENDIX III**

**Recommended Storage Times**

People often ask how long a food will keep. There is no absolute answer. Shelflife is dependent on many factors including the initial food type and quality, processing and preparation practices, storage temperature and the number and type of bacteria present both before and after processing.

Where possible, follow the manufacturers recommendation indicated by the “*best before*” date.

Otherwise, you may wish to follow the following guidelines.

<b>Maximum Recommended Storage Time for Refrigerated Food (0-4°C)</b>	
<b>Food</b>	<b>Storage Period (days)</b>
Ground meat	2 - 3
Roasts/steaks	3 - 5
Bacon/weiners	6 - 7
Poultry	2 - 3
Fish/Shellfish	1 - 2
Leftover egg yolk/white	1 - 2
Luncheon meats	3 - 5
Leftover cooked meats/gravy	1 - 2
Stuffing	1 - 2

<b>Maximum Recommended Storage Time for Frozen Foods (-18°C)</b>	
<b>Food</b>	<b>Storage Period (months)</b>
Roasts/steaks	3
Bacon/weiners	6
Poultry	6
Giblets	3
Fatty fish (salmon, mackerel)	3
Shellfish	3
Othre fish	6
Leftover meats/gravy	3
Precooked combination dishes	6
Bread dough containing yeast	1
Cake batter	4

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<b>Maximum Recommended Storage Time for Dry Goods (room temperature)</b>	
<b>Food</b>	<b>Storage Period (months)</b>
dry yeast	18
powdered milk	4
canned goods	12
cereal grains	8
spices	24
dry beans	24
dried fruit	8
jams/jellies	12
nuts	12
pickles	12
flour	12



## **APPENDIX IV**

### **Local Authority Contacts**

