

Section 5: Re-Packaging Bulk Foods

Is Repackaging a Significant Risk?

Repackaging is the most complex food preparation operation at most food programs. Repackaging consists of dividing large or bulk packages of food into smaller units. These units are typically sized to meet the needs of a family for a few days.

Repackaging is considered a complex food preparation operation because it involves breaking quality control seals, physically handling the product (as opposed to just handling the package) and labeling information for product safety.

Frozen or Refrigerated Product

Few food programs have the capacity to safely repackage frozen, refrigerated or prepared foods. This process requires special training and facilities. General information about repackaging frozen or prepared foods is provided in this manual. Do not repackage these types of foods unless your food program has been inspected and certified for that purpose.

Contact your local health district representative for more information and to obtain the necessary certification.

Dry Product

Food programs repackage dry goods (bean, rice, etc.) from bulk packaging to family-sized units. Most facilities can be modified to meet the standards necessary for this process.

This Section of the manual will introduce HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) as a prevention-based system for managing food safety in food programs. Before we look at HACCP, however, a few points on preparing for repackaging are worth exploring.

Repackaging Environment & Equipment

As explained in Section 2 of this manual, the facilities for any food preparation operation should be separate from other food activities. If physical separation (a separate room) is not possible, the activities should be separated by time. You should not, for example, re-package food in the same place and time as you are distributing to clients.

It is important that the re-packaging area be close to a source of hot water. Hot water is necessary for hand washing and general cleaning and sanitizing purposes.

The facilities must also be easily cleanable, not-absorbent, durable and smooth (ENDS). This includes floors, walls, ceilings, counter tops, equipment and storage containers.

Before beginning a re-packaging operation, the facility should be clean. All counter tops should be sanitized with 100 ppm chlorine (see booklet 2). Equipment, utensils and containers should be washed, rinsed, sanitized with 50 ppm chlorine (see Section 2) and air dried. These areas should be cleaned again immediately after use.

It is important to note that shallow containers cool more quickly than deep containers. Metal containers also speed the cooling process since the metal conducts heat more rapidly than plastic. Metal containers may be used, for example, to stack filled baggies.

Containers

Containers for repackaged foods should either be new or sanitized. All packaging should be easily cleanable, non-absorbent, durable and smooth. It should seal in order to protect the product. Note: "Vacuum packaging" is not recommended for food program repackaging efforts.



New Containers

- The easiest solution for repackaging is to use zip-lock bags. Paper bags offer minimal protection and are not recommended.
- Never re-use baggies, aluminum foil, plastic wrap or freezer wrap since they cannot be easily cleaned, are not durable, and are not non-absorbent. All of these qualities make it easy for the materials to collect bacteria.

Sanitized, Re-Used Containers

- Examples of containers which may be re-used are glass jars and heavy plastic tubs (butter containers or restaurant grade containers such as those used for sour cream in restaurants). Containers may be donated by individuals or restaurants.
- Containers that are being considered for re-use must have originally contained food, have smooth surfaces and be free of seams. Cans (i.e., coffee cans) can not be used for repackaging food items, but may be acceptable for non-food items, like laundry detergent.
- Containers should be carefully examined for chips or cracks. Jar lids should be clean and free of rust. All defective containers should be discarded.
- Containers may be cleaned either by washing, rinsing, sanitizing with 50 ppm chlorine and air drying or by washing in a dishwasher where the final rinse reaches 180oF. Some residential dishwashers may not have rinse cycles that reach 180oF and may not be approved by the county health agency for use in food programs. Some residential dishwashers do, however, have a longer rinse cycle than commercial dishwashers, so a residential dishwasher might be acceptable if the full rinse cycle is allowed to run.

For more information on manual dishwashing, see Section 2 of this manual.

Handling

Section 3 of this manual series explains the general principles for handling food. It is especially important that these principles be observed during re-packaging operations. For example:

- Disposable, single use gloves should be used whenever a worker is touching a food that will not be washed or cooked before consumption.
- Utensils may also be used to avoid direct hand-to-food contact.
- Dispose of unsafe food appropriately and quickly. Surplus food may be given to pig farmers or local composting groups. Bleach or ivory soap should be used to denature food in dumpsters or trash cans so that it is not re-used.
- Use caution in repackaging any food that will be served to an “at-risk” population. Examples include powdered milk or formula used to serve infants or the elderly, or fresh fruits and vegetables in food programs that serve clients with AIDS or other medical conditions. Food programs should, however, assume that everyone they serve is in an “at-risk” population and take appropriate precautions.
- Use care in repackaging any food that was packaged under pressure, heat or vacuum sealed. Violation of this type of package decreases the shelf life and may require special measures such as refrigeration. Most canned and bottled goods fall in this category.
- Use packaging which is appropriate for the food you are working with. Never pour hot liquids into ordinary glass jars since they are not tempered to withstand sudden heat changes and may break.
- Temperature control of refrigerated or frozen food is critical and should be monitored. Frozen food should never be re-frozen once thawed. Refrigerated food should be kept at the appropriate temperature.

Dispose of any refrigerated or frozen food that has been out of temperature in your facility for more than 2 hours.

The amount of time that a food has been “out of temperature” is cumulative. It includes time spent in transporting, thawing, during preparation and distribution~ As food programs can not guarantee how the food was handled prior to the receipt of the food or how long clients will take to get the food home, all possible care should be take to assure that refrigerated or frozen food is placed in proper temperature control immediately.

Labeling

Labeling is required by law on all food produced by manufacturers. In repackaging operations, food programs separate the label information from the food. Minimally, you should supply a replacement label with the product name, ingredients and net weight. A more complete label, however, would include:

1. The common or usual name of the product
2. The net weight
3. A list of ingredients
4. Applicable dates (such as the original “sell by” date, the date the food was repackaged or the expiration date)
5. The name of the distributing agency.
6. You could also include preparation or serving instructions on the label. For some foods, a recipe has been shown to dramatically increase the rate of use.

Section 5 Self Test

1. Which information is not required on a label?

- a) Product name
- b) Net weight
- c) Picture of product
- d) Ingredients

2. Which method below is an acceptable way to dispose of unusable food?

- a) Throw it in the garbage
- b) Flush it down the toilet
- c) Feed it to the neighborhood dogs
- d) Denature it with bleach or ivory soap and discard it.

3. Which container would cool food the quickest?

- a) 5 gallon plastic tub
- b) 6 inch tall metal pan
- c) 2 inch tall metal pan

True or False

T F Paper bags are good repackaging containers.

T F Zip-lock bags may be re-usable if they are washed and sanitized.

T F Jars or tubs which are re-used should be washed, rinsed, sanitized with 50 ppm chlorine and air dried.

T F Jars with only small chips may be used as long as they don't leak.

T F Gloves or utensils should be used to avoid hand-to-food contact when repackaging.

Using HACCP to Ensure Food Safety

HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) is a preventative food safety system designed for use in the space program. HACCP ensures food quality by considering food handling as one continuous system: from receiving to storage and preparation. Many types of food service now use HACCP to manage food quality.

HACCP recognizes five Critical Control Points:

1. Cooking
2. Cooling
3. Cross contamination
4. Re-heating
5. Holding

Most food program operations do not include cooking as part of normal operations; some food programs do conduct cooking classes or prepare sample meals to show what can be done with the food they provide. Food programs do routinely deal with the remaining four CCP's during repackaging operations.

Product are thawed, repackaged, cooled and held. We will consider all these steps in developing a HACCP approach to safe handling of repackaged food.

The following steps make using HACCP easy.

1. Chart the food flow for any potentially hazardous food that you provide. Do this by observing actual procedures and including all steps from receiving to delivery.
2. Identify the Critical Control Points in the process. A CCP is any point where control can be applied to eliminate or reduce a food safety hazard.
3. Establish Critical Limits for temperature, time or any other factor that can serve as a "boundary" for safe food.

These limits can be based on information from the other Sections in this manual. For example, the limits on time for thawing and preparation would correspond to information in Section 4, which says that food must not remain out of temperature for more than two hours and that thawing should occur in the refrigerator or under running water.

- ...> Determine what types of monitoring will insure that Critical Limits are observed.
- ...> Document monitoring and corrections. In order to verify the process, it is necessary to keep records of how you meet the critical limit and any corrective actions.

Corrections are necessary whenever monitoring shows a problem.

- ...> Verify that the HACCP process works. Verification uses the documentation records from step 5. For example, when repackaging chicken, how often was the temperature taken? Were the temperatures always less than 40°F? If the product was out of temperature, could it be brought back to temperature in time or was it discarded?

The next pages show a sample HACCP chart, a repackaging flow chart, and a blank HACCP flow diagram.

Use the blank HACCP flow diagram to design a HACCP plan for a food that your food program repackages. You may also design your own diagram based on what best fits your program's operating procedures. After you have filled in the operation flow, decide which steps are critical control points and show how they can be monitored.

Figure 1: A Sample HACCP Chart

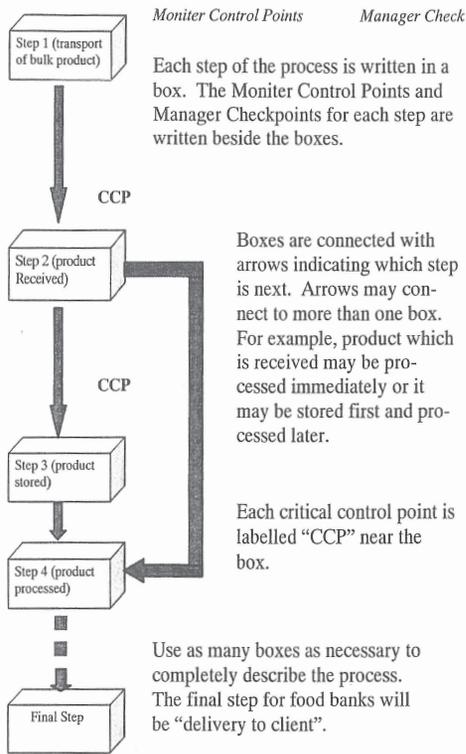


Figure 2: A Sample Repackaging Flow Chart

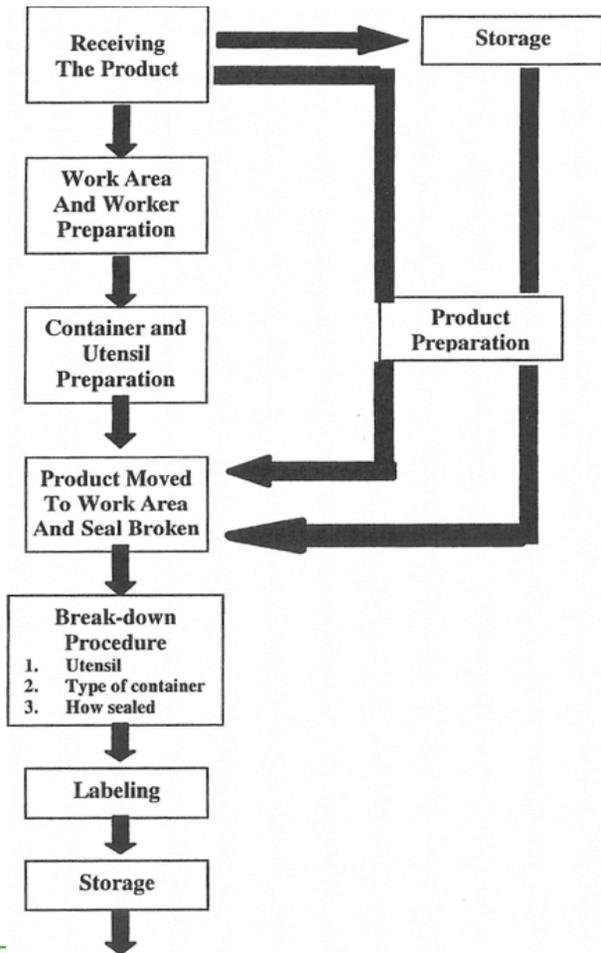
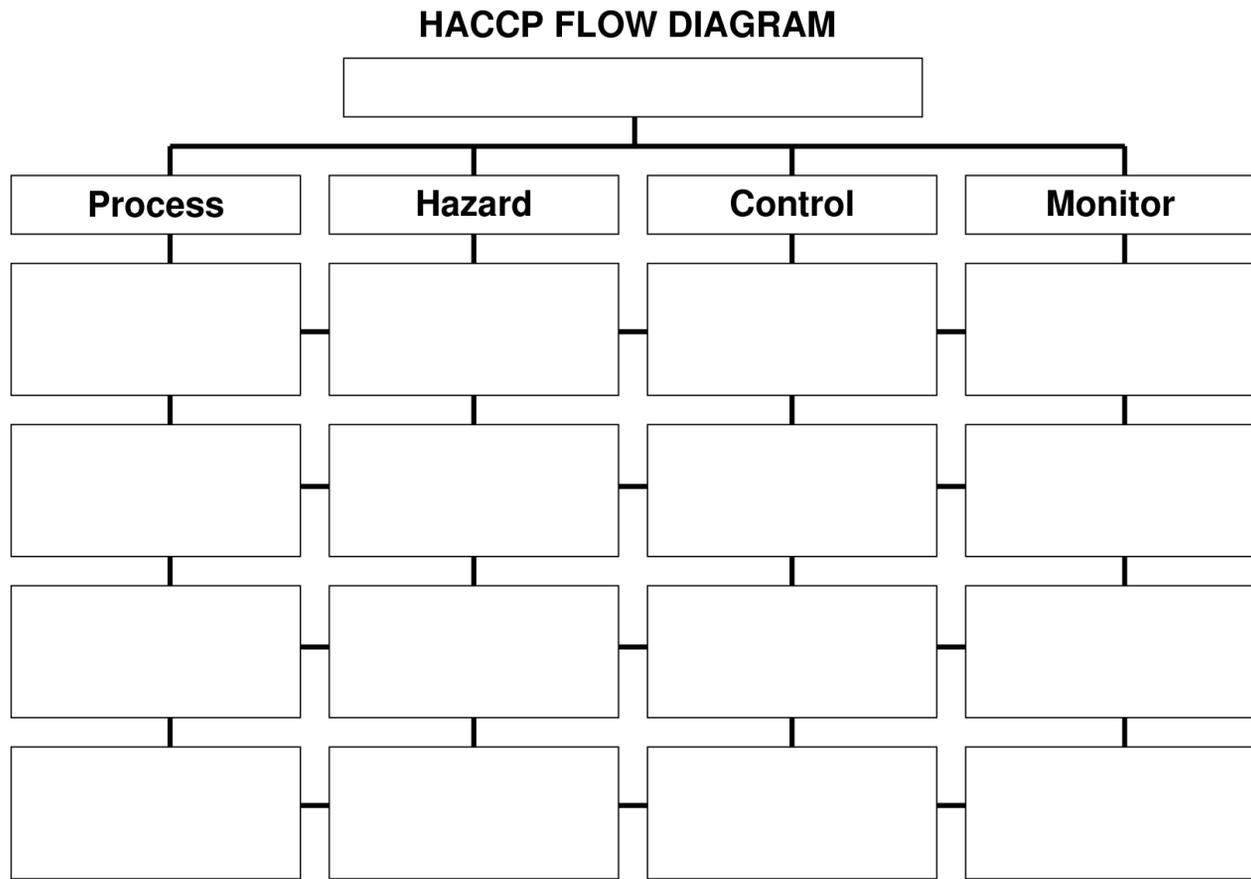


Figure 3: A Fill-in-the-Blank HACCP Flow Diagram



More Questions About Food Safety?

Washington Food Coalition would welcome the chance to hear from you!

Just call or write.

Washington Food Coalition is a member-based statewide coalition of emergency food providers.

*To learn more about membership, visit us online at www.wafoodcoalition.org or call us at 1-877-729-0501.
Contact information for all WFC members is available at our online member community portal at wafoodcoalition.org*



PREM
PR

CAUTION
SLIP
FL

CAUTION
SLIP
FL

THE STONES ARE