



# FOOD DEFENSE STRATEGIES

## A Self-Assessment Guide for Food Service Operators

**What Can You Do to Protect  
Your Business from Food  
Contamination?**

**Use this guide and checklist to  
identify potential security issues  
in your operation.**

**Why should I be concerned about Food Defense?**

The retail food establishment operator is the front line in protecting our food supply. Thousands of people stop every day to have a snack, a drink or a full meal at a restaurant. There are countless opportunities to tamper with food.

**Why are food establishments at risk?**

The Homeland Security Administration and other government agencies have identified the food industry as a potential “target” for an act of terrorism. An attack on our food supply can make customers ill, and cause panic. It also can have a huge effect on our economy.

**What can I do about it?**

Even a small incident can have a major impact on a food establishment.

Take the time to perform this self-assessment of your operation. It can help you lower your risk of being a target, and also can improve your work practices.

## Why do a self- assessment?

A self-assessment will take less than an hour and will provide you with a valuable snapshot of your operation.

Self-assessment is a powerful management tool. By examining your operation, you may find ways to improve not just security and safety, but general work practices.

## How do I do a self- assessment?

There are three basic steps to self-assessment:

1. Document your operation. Write down what you do, and how you do it. To find out what is really happening, ask your employees to describe in detail how they do each task. Use the checklist enclosed in this booklet as a guide.
2. Compare your systems to recommended practices or standards. This booklet provides information on food safety and security practices. Note areas where you can make changes.
3. Get help where you need it. Consult experts, including your local health department, vendors, and your police department, for advice on how to best address your specific safety and security issues.

## Your Facility

Unrestricted access to your operation makes it an easy target for food tampering or other terrorist activity.

### Key Points:

- ☑ Restrict customers to public areas only.
- ☑ Limit facility access to employees and contractors.

# Security Strategies

## Property Security

This could include any of the following:

- ☑ Do a walk-through inspection of your facility and storage areas daily.
- ☑ Provide outside lighting. Make it difficult for someone to approach your facility without being seen.
- ☑ Request regular police patrols.
- ☑ Provide fences or other barriers around your property.
- ☑ Provide surveillance. An alarm system or video surveillance is expensive. If there has been a problem with building security in the past, however, it may be a wise investment.

## Building Security

- ☑ Close and lock service doors, except during deliveries.
- ☑ Discourage loitering.
- ☑ Restrict key access to trusted employees. Know who has keys at all times.

**Keep service doors closed, and lock them to prevent access from the outside.**

## Your Employees

Your employees, and their training, are vital to food safety and security.

### Key Points:

- ☑ Do employee background checks, and verify information given.
- ☑ Train employees to recognize potential security risks and report them to management.
- ☑ Ensure each shift manager knows what to do if an incident occurs.

# Security Strategies

## New Employees

- ☑ Perform complete background checks on all potential employees. Verify references, addresses, phone numbers, and information on immigration status and criminal record.
- ☑ Actively supervise new employees to ensure they learn and follow established procedures.

## All Employees

- ☑ Keeping experienced employees is an excellent security strategy. In addition to developing mutual trust, your employees will perform at a higher level of skill.
- ☑ Train all employees to recognize food safety and security threats, including product tampering. Train employees to report problems to a supervisor immediately.
- ☑ Limit employee access to areas needed for their job functions.
- ☑ Keep a roster of all employees expected on each shift, and discourage off-duty employees from loitering.
- ☑ Keep personal items out of the work and storage areas. Have a separate place to store personal belongings.

## Your Products

The products you buy, and how you store and use them, are critical in protecting your business.

### Key Points:

- ☑ Know who delivers to your facility and what they deliver.
- ☑ Have someone available to accept all deliveries.
- ☑ Store food and non-food items separately and secure all products.





## **Your Food Preparation Steps**

Food preparation practices can lower your risk of problems.

### **Key Points:**

- ☑ Examine ingredients before using them. Don't use a food that has an unusual look or smell.
  
- ☑ Develop a routine for all tasks. When food is prepared the same way every time, it is easier to know if something is not right.

# Security Strategies

## Food Preparation

- ☑ Inspect cans and packages for damage prior to using.
- ☑ Examine ingredients before use, and don't use a food that has an unusual look or smell.
- ☑ Establish standardized procedures for food preparation, and train employees in these procedures. Routinely check that procedures are followed.
- ☑ Cook foods thoroughly to destroy food pathogens.
- ☑ Use a calibrated probe thermometer to check temperature every time.
- ☑ Strictly enforce “no bare hand” policies (use of gloves or tongs) with ready-to-eat foods.

## Food Holding

- ☑ Know safe temperatures for hot and cold holding, and check temperatures often.
- ☑ Hold hot food above 135°F/57°C.
- ☑ Cold holding units, such as sandwich prep units, should keep products below 41°F/5°C. Keep lids and doors closed.
- ☑ Limit holding unit access to food preparation and service staff.

## Your Customer Service Area

Control of the service area prevents product tampering.

### Key Points:

- ☑ Place self-service stations, such as salad bars and buffets, in areas where staff can easily supervise them.
- ☑ Be aware of anyone lingering in the self-service area.

## Security Strategies

### Customers

- ☑ Keep customers out of food preparation areas.
- ☑ Discuss your security measures only with government and law enforcement officials.
- ☑ Be aware of anyone lingering in self-service areas, or of anyone who seems overly interested in your operations.
- ☑ Be alert for packages and bags left unattended.

### Self-Service Areas

- ☑ Place self-service areas like salad bars where staff can watch them.
- ☑ Put out only as much food as you need.
- ☑ Replace food containers when replenishing salad bars or buffets. Don't add new food to old containers.
- ☑ Rotate foods such as croutons or condiments regularly.

## Your Cleaning Practices

One of the best defenses against foodborne illness is your cleaning and sanitizing routine.

### Key Points:

- ☑ Follow instructions on using equipment and cleaners exactly. Improper use can lessen the cleaning effect.
- ☑ Clean and sanitize as often as possible.

## Security Strategies

### Cleaning

- ☑ Use only chemicals approved for use in a food establishment.
- ☑ Follow directions for cleaners and sanitizers exactly. Too little or too much detergent or sanitizer can actually be less effective! Ask your supplier or health department for advice.
- ☑ Clean and sanitize equipment and work areas after each use.
- ☑ Clean and sanitize containers in self-service areas after each batch is used.
- ☑ To ensure proper sanitizing, check water temperature or sanitizer concentration frequently.

### Chemical Storage

- ☑ Store chemicals away from food preparation areas.
- ☑ Secure chemical storage areas at all times.
- ☑ Use cleaners and sanitizers according to manufacturer's recommendations.
- ☑ Discard old chemicals as instructed on the label.

# Important Numbers:

**Local Health Department**

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**Local Police**

Contact the police if you suspect food tampering or other criminal activity.

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**Poison Control**

1-800-222-1222