



1008 E. Locust
Emmett, ID 83617
208/365-6371

824 S. Diamond
Nampa, ID 83686
208/465-8400

1155 3rd Ave. N.
Payette, ID 83661
208/642-9321

46 W. Court St.
Weiser, ID 83672
208/549-2370

Media Advisory

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 8, 2006

For more information, contact:
Laurie Boston at (208) 455-5325 or
lboston@phd3.state.id.us

Note to Editor: This is the third in the series of articles Southwest District Health (SWDH) has provided to promote food safety practices. In culmination of September's National Food Safety Month, SWDH's Food Merit Awards will be announced on September 26, 2006.

Be Cool—Chill Out for Safe Food Storage **By C. J. Soltis** **Southwest District Health** **Consumer Protection Programs**

Every refrigerator has it, whether it is the opened bottle of spaghetti sauce or the half-eaten package of deli meat. . . it's the *mystery food*. *Mystery food* is that item you can't remember when it was opened or when you last used it. Many of us just shut the door to worry about it later or grow lab experiments that may be harmful to our health. Here are some guidelines to take the *mystery* out of your cold food storage.

First and Foremost--Chill! Make sure the temperature in your refrigerator is 40 °F or below and 0 °F or below in the freezer. Use a refrigerator/freezer thermometer to check if your appliance maintains the proper storing temperature. Harmful bacteria grow most rapidly in unsafe temperatures between 40 and 140 °F—so it's important to keep food out of this temperature range.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends the following cold food storage time frames to reduce your risk of a food-related illness. Additional refrigeration holding information can be found at www.foodsafety.gov/~fsg/f01chart.html.

Product

Fresh in shell eggs
Hard-cooked
Egg/Tuna/Chicken/macaroni salads
Ground Beef, Turkey, veal, pork, lamb
Ham, fully cooked –slices
Hot Dogs
Luncheon Meats
Bacon

Refrigeration

3-5 weeks
1 week
3-5 days
1-2 days
3-5 days
(Unopened) 2 weeks/(opened) 1 week
(Unopened Packages) 2 wks/(opened) 3-5 days
7 days

-MORE-

Be Cool—Chill Out for Safe Food Storage

By C. J. Soltis

Southwest District Health

Page Two

<u>Product</u>	<u>Refrigeration</u>
Leftovers	3-4 days
Steaks, Chops, Roasts	3-5 days
Whole Chickens/Turkeys	1-2 days
Fresh Fish and Shellfish	1-2 days

You should also regularly clean out your refrigerator to help combat the *mystery food* issue. A good time to do this is before grocery shopping. Start by throwing out the perishable food items that should not be eaten. When possible try using the First In First Out, or FIFO, method of storage. When in doubt, throw it out!

In addition, always review the dates that are marked on most food containers purchased from the grocery store. But what do the phrases of “use by” or “sell by” mean?

- **“Sell-By”** is the date that informs the store how long to display the product for sale. You should purchase the product before the date expires
- **“Best if Used By”** or **“Use-By”** is the date recommended for best flavor or quality and is not a purchase or safety date. This date is determined by the manufacturer, and does not tell how long the food will be good.
- **“Expiration Date”** is the last date that food should be eaten, except for eggs; this is the last day the eggs may be sold at the store.

Here are some additional tips to help keep your food safe.

- Do not buy food past the **“Sell-By,” “Use-By,”** or other expiration dates
- When shopping, purchase refrigerated or frozen items after selecting non-perishables (shelf stable foods) so they are the last thing you purchase before leaving the store.
- Refrigerate or freeze perishables, prepared food, and leftovers within 2 hours of purchase or preparation or within 1 hour if the temperature is above 90 °F.
- Thaw food in the refrigerator. For quick thawing, submerge in cold water in airtight packaging, or thaw in the microwave, and cook the food immediately.
- Do not open your refrigerator or freezer door more than necessary to keep the temperatures at proper storing temperatures. Keep perishable foods on shelves in the refrigerator, rather than on the door, since the temperature on the door fluctuates more.
- Do not overstuff your refrigerator. Cold air must circulate around food to keep it at proper temperatures.

By following these guidelines, you can Be Cool to eliminate the mystery food in your refrigerator; reduce wasting food and money; and reduce the risk of food borne illness to you and your family.

#####