



Wisconsin Food Code Fact Sheet



Date Marking of Ready-to-Eat Time-Temperature Control for Safety Foods

Why is date marking important?

Date marking is a way to control the growth of a bacteria called *Listeria*, which grows under refrigeration and is the third leading cause of death from foodborne illness in the United States.

What foods must be date marked?

Refrigerated, ready-to-eat (RTE), time-temperature control (TCS) foods prepared onsite or prepared by a food processing plant once the package is opened.

Foods exempt from date marking (3-501.17(G)):

- Foods held less than 24 hours.
- Deli salad coming from a food processing plant.
- Cultured dairy products (e.g., yogurt and sour cream).
- Hard cheese and semi-soft cheese.

How do I mark the containers?

Foods must be consumed, sold or discarded within seven days. The day of preparation/opening container counts as day one.

Mark the food container with a start/preparation date if made onsite or the day you open the container from a food processing plant.

or

Mark the container with an end/discard date.

Either method is acceptable as long as all employees understand the date marking system.

If RTE, TCS ingredients from different process dates are combined, the date mark must be from the date of the earliest processed ingredient.

If RTE, TCS foods are frozen after preparation or opening, only the time stored in the refrigerator will be counted as part of the seven-day total.

Date marking examples

EXAMPLE 1: A turkey is cooked and cooled on the morning of October 1; it was held under refrigeration for two days and then frozen. If the turkey is thawed on October 10, it must then be consumed or discarded no later than midnight of October 14:

Date	Shelf life/day	Action
Oct. 1	1	Cook/cool/cold hold
Oct. 2	2	Cold hold
Oct. 3		Freeze
Oct. 10	3	Thaw under refrigeration
Oct. 11	4	Cold hold/consume
Oct. 12	5	Cold hold/consume
Oct. 13	6	Cold hold/consume
Oct. 14	7	Cold hold/consumer
Oct. 15	8	Discard

EXAMPLE 2: A prepackaged deli ham is opened and partially sliced on July 3. The non-sliced portion is wrapped, dated with a discard date of July 9, stored in the refrigerator, and pulled to slice per customer order. On July 5, the remaining ham is sliced and placed in a grab-and-go cooler. The sliced ham would be dated with a final sell date of July 9, and any remaining ham would be discarded by that date.