



Wisconsin Food Code Fact Sheet



RESPONSE TO SEWAGE BACKUP

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Sewage contains pathogens that could become a source of contamination on equipment, environmental surfaces, cleaning tools, and the shoes and clothing of employees and/or customers. Limiting contamination from sewage requires control of affected areas and preventing contamination from being spread to non-contaminated areas, items, people, and food. *It is recommended that the license holder note the date and time of the event. The Person-In-Charge (PIC) should assess the situation and implement emergency procedures. Immediately discontinue operation if a safe operation cannot be maintained or if food safety cannot be assured using an alternative procedure. If there is a significant threat or danger to health, then an imminent health hazard may exist and the license holder should immediately discontinue operations and notify the Regulatory Authority.*

Public Health Considerations

During a sewage backup, one of the primary concerns is to protect the health of employees and customers. Ask yourself if there is an imminent health hazard that would prevent safe operation and if employees and/or customers are exposed to sewage. The PIC is responsible for conducting both initial and ongoing assessments to ensure consistent compliance with food safety requirements.

Ability to Operate Considerations

Determine whether the facility can remain open or if parts of the facility can remain operational. Consider the following:

- Have you consulted the Regulatory Authority?
- Are specific steps identified to address each area and the affected equipment that is no longer operational due to the sewage backup?
- Are back-up or temporary systems available?
- Can contaminated areas and/or equipment be isolated?
- Can a safe food environment and operation be assured?
- Does remaining open aid the community and those in need?
- Can alternate procedures be used to meet food safety requirements for food preparation and handling, employee health and hygiene, utensil and equipment sanitation, linen use and laundering, single-use utensils, and waste disposal?



Affected Areas and Operations

- Discontinue all operations if sewage continues to backup into the facility from a floor drain, toilet, sink, or other appliance.
- If no handwashing sinks are operational and no alternative handwashing facilities can be set up, food preparation must cease and only prepackaged foods may be served.
- If there are no operational toilets accessible to employees during all business, operation must cease.

Follow the guidelines below if equipment connected directly to the plumbing system does not drain or is slow to drain:

- Discard all contaminated food.
- Remove all affected equipment/fixtures from service.
- Remove the obstruction causing the sewage back-up or call a service company.
- Isolate and keep foot traffic away from the areas that were contaminated with sewage.
- If providing prepackaged foods, use approved hand antiseptics ([Hand Antiseptics Fact Sheet](#)) or chemically treated towelettes for hand washing.
- Portable mobile toilets and hand washing stations may be approved by the regulatory authority.
- If unable to use warewashing equipment, only single service/single use items may be used.
- Dispose of any cleaning wastewater into a sanitary waste drainage system. A working toilet, existing floor drain, or neighboring facility may be used temporarily.

Salvaging Food Following a Sewage Backup

Discard the following foods if sewage has covered, splashed, dripped, or seeped into the package:

- All opened containers and packages
- Alcoholic beverages
- Exposed foods, bulk foods, fresh produce, meat, poultry, fish, and eggs
- Any food packaged in paper, plastic, cloth, or fiber
- Cardboard boxes, even if contents seem dry, such as cereals, pasta, or rice
- Food in glass jars, including unopened jars
- Foods; liquids; beverages in crown-capped bottles; or containers with pull-tabs, corks, or screw caps
- Foods with cardboard seals such as mayonnaise and salad dressings
- Canned food that is damaged, dented, leaking bulging, rusted, or has missing labels
- Foods in bags or canisters



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Clean Up Following a Sewage Backup

- Remove any standing sewage as soon as possible.
- All equipment, utensils, environmental surfaces, floors, walls, and other affected areas in contact with sewage must be cleaned and disinfected prior to being placed back into service. Refer to the [Vomit Diarrhea Cleanup Fact Sheet](#) for more information.
- Dispose of any cleaning equipment or tools that cannot be decontaminated after use for sewage cleanup activities.
- Put procedures in place to ensure employees are not spreading contamination with their shoes as they walk between the affected area and other areas of the facility.
- Ensure employees are protected during cleanup with eye protection and protective clothing. Refer to the [Vomit Diarrhea Cleanup Fact Sheet](#) for more tips.
- Air dry the affected areas, utensils, surfaces, and equipment after cleaning and disinfection.
- Unsalvageable food, food equipment, and all single service items that came into contact with sewage (packaged or unpackaged) must be destroyed and properly disposed of.
- Use caution when working on or restarting equipment with electrical components.
- Linens or uniforms contaminated by sewage must be discarded or professionally laundered.

Documentation of Incident/Expense

Make sure a designated person records and documents all incidents/expenses incurred as a result of the sewage backup, including photo and video records, if possible.

Additional Information

[DATCP Food Code Fact Sheets](#)

[Emergency Action Plan for Retail Food Establishment](#)

[AFDO Food Emergency Regulator Pocket Guide](#)



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