

Thinking About a Remodel or New Construction?

Protect Your Business and Keep Food Safety in Mind

Construction in your store can be a disruptive event. Especially if you plan to keep the business open during the construction process. Throughout the process, a variety of food safety hazards can be present, potentially putting your products at risk. While the contractors you work with are skilled at their trade, protecting your brand is ultimately your responsibility.

Here are some precautions that you can take to minimize the food safety risks during construction and keep your products, store and employees safe.

Preparation: The Important First Steps for Safety

- Have an environmental plan before construction starts. This will help the process go smoothly and maintain safety. If the plan needs changes or improvements, make them in advance of construction and be sure that your staff is up to speed before the project begins.
- Remove all equipment that can be moved from the construction zone. Cover all electrical panels, open conduit and electrical outlets to minimize areas that might harbor dust or bacteria during construction.
- Take steps to separate the construction and food production areas. Install heavy gauge plastic sheeting or even temporary walls to isolate the construction area will help prevent cross-contamination. If the temporary barriers have doors or wall openings, make sure they are sealed on both sides. Gaps between the base of the barriers and the floor should also be adequately sealed to keep the surrounding production areas safe. The goal is to minimize organisms from traveling by air outside of the construction zone.
- Evaluate the HVAC and air handling system in the construction area. Thoroughly clean the HVAC system and filters before the construction process starts. Close off or divert the airflow to prevent air movement from the construction zone to any food production areas. Additionally, if you are expanding square footage, make sure the system will be able to accommodate additional areas or space after construction is complete.

Involve Your Contractors

- Schedule a formal food safety training session with the contractor and all members of the construction staff. Let them know your expectations and the jobsite requirements. Determine which protective clothing the contractor, and their team, will need (frocks, boot covers or hairnets, for example). Provide a separate area for them to store their belongings during the construction process.
- Designate a single entrance for contractors and construction staff to minimize confusion and avoid mistaken entries into food production areas. Their entrance should be separate from those used by office and food production employees. Do not allow construction materials or equipment to enter non-construction areas of the facility.
- Construction staff and in-house food production staff should be separated to prevent cross-contamination as well. This includes breakrooms. There shouldn't be any direct paths from the construction area to the food production areas. Temporary hand wash sinks may be needed for construction employees to follow frequent hand washing and sanitizing procedures.

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Construction Best Practices for Sanitation

- Before demolishing and removing any walls during the construction process, apply a quaternary ammonia-based foam disinfectant at 800–1000 ppm without rinsing to the area. If any equipment needs to be moved, or if there will be new equipment brought into the area, clean and disinfect it with quaternary ammonia at the same concentration without rinsing.
- If your construction project involves new equipment installation, discuss the sanitation requirements and restrictions with your sanitation chemical provider before purchasing the equipment. This will help to ensure that you have the right chemicals on hand and understand the equipment's cleaning requirements prior to purchase.
- Clean and sanitize any new equipment, as well as the area where it will be installed, before bringing the equipment into the new area. Make sure all the surfaces of the new equipment are compatible with your current cleaning chemistry and that the installation follows proper food safety guidelines. No bare wood. If necessary, upgrade your food safety process to accommodate the new equipment.

Completing Construction and Beginning Food Production

- Once the construction project is complete, remove all construction materials, tools, debris, plastic sheeting and temporary walls. Seal any holes that might have occurred in the floors, walls and ceilings where equipment was moved, and repair or replace epoxy or other floor coverings.
- Clean the HVAC and air handling system and return it to either its pre-construction settings or an updated configuration based on what the new area requires.
- Clean everything in the construction area, from ceiling to floor. This includes lights, walls, drains, refrigeration units and all equipment. Have the correct cleaning products on hand ahead of time to avoid delays.

All Set Up For Success

While an expansion or a remodel can mean new capabilities for your business, lax food safety processes during construction can jeopardize those new opportunities. By creating a plan, educating contractors and employees, and following your plan, you will be able to expand while protecting your brand and avoiding food safety issues.

