



WHITE PAPER

Improving RTE
(Ready-to-Eat) Food
Safety by Building a
More Complete and
Modern Safety
Management System

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RizePoint | White Paper

EVERY FOOD SERVICES BUSINESS—FROM TRADITIONAL RESTAURANTS TO GROCERY STORE DELIS AND CONVENIENCE STORES—UNDERSTANDS THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING HIGH FOOD SAFETY STANDARDS. IN SPITE OF ALL THE REGULATIONS, STANDARDS, PROCESSES, AND MONEY DEDICATED TO KEEPING FOOD SAFE, THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE STILL BECOME SERIOUSLY ILL EVERY YEAR FROM FOODBORNE ILLNESSES AND DISEASES, AND MORE THAN HALF OF THOSE ILLNESSES CAN BE ATTRIBUTED DIRECTLY TO FOOD PREPARED IN RESTAURANTS¹.

Of course, the reasons behind these outbreaks are complex and diverse—from poorly vetted, low-quality food suppliers to a single worker who comes to work with an illness. However, there are a few common denominators that tend to show up in most of today's serious and high-profile foodborne illness outbreaks. Perhaps the most important of these common factors involves the preparation and handling of ready-to-eat (RTE) foods. In fact, refrigerated RTE foods make up the vast majority of items that are recalled due to the presence of the dangerous (and potentially deadly) *Listeria monocytogenes* pathogen.

So what makes RTE foods such a common and persistent food safety challenge for restaurants, delis, and other food service businesses? What are some of the main characteristics of RTE foods that make them especially susceptible to food safety issues? And most important, what are the keys to managing, storing, and handling RTE foods safely and consistently, so your business can avoid the potentially devastating effects of even one foodborne illness outbreak?

Top Five Foodborne Risk Factors

According to the FDA, these are the top five factors that put your organization at risk for foodborne disease outbreaks²:

1. Improper hot/cold holding temperatures of potentially hazardous foods
2. Improper cooking temperatures of food
3. Contaminated utensils and equipment
4. Poor personal hygiene
5. Food from unsafe sources

¹ Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Surveillance for Foodborne Disease Outbreaks, United States, 2013, Annual Report*. Atlanta, Georgia: US Department of Health and Human Services, CDC, 2015.

² Source: www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulationRetailFoodProtection/Foodcode/ucm188363.htm.



An RTE Food Safety Primer

To begin answering these important questions, it's helpful to review the food safety basics that relate to most RTE products. In the context of restaurants, delis, and other retail food service businesses, ready-to-eat foods are typically defined as pre-prepared items that don't require additional preparation or cooking before they're served to customers. This includes everything from cut salad and vegetables and shredded cheese to pre-made salads and cut desserts.

These types of foods present interesting food safety challenges because they typically don't undergo the same cooking processes that kill dangerous pathogens in other foods. This makes RTE foods particularly susceptible to the transfer of bacteria and pathogens from other sources, such as employees with illnesses, unwashed hands, and contact with raw foods. As a result, RTE foods require even more meticulous and consistent adherence to sound food handling practices because they don't enjoy the safety net of being cooked immediately before they're served. All food safety rules and procedures are obviously important. However, as you work to refine and improve your food handling practices, there are a few that are especially relevant for protecting vulnerable RTE foods. Most of these should already be part of your standard food safety rules and procedures, but in some cases, keeping RTE foods safe may require even stricter practices or enhanced enforcement.

PROPER RTE FOOD LABELING AND ROTATION

Meticulous labeling and rotation are obviously important for all perishable items, but it's especially critical for RTE foods where sight and smell alone can't always detect problems. Make sure you maintain a detailed labeling system for all RTE foods and train employees

to label accurately all RTE foods and discard items that don't meet strict criteria—even if they still look and smell fine.

CONSISTENT TEMPERATURE MONITORING AND CONTROL

Sound, consistent labeling and rotation practices can't lower your RTE risks unless you also establish and maintain strict temperature controls for all of your RTE foods. Making sure you have accurate, clearly visible thermometers installed in all your refrigeration units is a good place to start. However, you also need a formal monitoring system that allows you to identify refrigeration problems quickly and consistently take the appropriate actions to keep RTE foods safe.

REMOVING EMPLOYEES WHO ARE ILL

Nearly every reputable restaurant or food service organization has policies that forbid sick employees who are vomiting or have diarrhea from coming to work—or at least prohibit them from handling food. However, this is one area where there is often a large gap between policy and practice. All too often, short-staffed managers are willing to look the other way when sick employees come to work. Keeping sick employees—and the dangerous pathogens that come with them—out of the workplace requires discipline, active monitoring, and consistent enforcement.

PROPER HAND WASHING

Make sure all of your employees, without exception, wash their hands using the proper technique every time they use the restroom and every time they handle food. In fact, best practices for hand washing include a two-step process where employees wash their hands once in the bathroom and again in the food prep area before handling food. The best way to ensure consistent hand washing is to implement a formal, active monitoring program.



KEEPING RTE ITEMS SEPARATE FROM OTHER FOODS

One of the biggest safety issues surrounding RTE foods involves transferring pathogens from regular raw foods to RTE items. This creates an unacceptable level of risk, because unlike most raw foods, RTE foods do not go through any kind of pathogen-killing cooking process after they are prepped.

To avoid these risks, you should have, whenever possible, separate staff, equipment, and physical areas for preparing and storing raw and RTE foods. Of course, in many cases, this may not be possible, but you can achieve the same effect by:

- Cleaning and disinfecting prep areas before using them for RTE foods
- Using appropriate barriers, like chopping boards, as the primary contact surface for RTE foods
- Meticulously washing hands or using disposable gloves properly when switching between prepping raw and RTE foods
- Using separate sets of utensils for raw and RTE food preparation
- Thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting multi-use food prep areas before prepping RTE foods

Common RTE Food Pathogens

There are a number of different pathogens that can compromise improperly handled RTE foods. Here are a few of the most common (and dangerous) examples:

LISTERIA MONOCYTOGENES—Today's biggest concern for ready-to-eat foods. Listeria is especially challenging because it can survive and grow at refrigerated food temperatures. It's also uniquely dangerous, because unlike many other pathogens, it kills a significant percentage people who become ill with it.

SALMONELLA—Less common and deadly than Listeria but still one of the world's most widespread microorganisms. It presents significant risks for a number of refrigerated RTE products that include poultry, meat, and eggs.

CAMPYLOBACTER—Quickly emerging as a significant concern for many types of RTE food products, although it is most often associated with raw poultry products.

STAPHYLOCOCCUS—Listeria has received most of the headlines recently, but staphylococcus is still the world's top food poisoning organism. Although it doesn't grow well at traditional refrigeration temperatures, it can become a major concern when RTE products are not stored at proper temperatures or held a little too long.

E COLI—This dangerous organism doesn't typically originate with RTE foods, but it can be transferred when RTE items share prep areas with raw foods.



Designing and Implementing a Proactive Food Safety Management System

Today, virtually every retail food service organization recognizes the tremendous damage a single foodborne illness outbreak can cause, and most of them understand and embrace best practices for handling RTE and other types of foods. However, when it comes to food safety—including the safety of sensitive RTE foods—good intentions and sound policies are never enough. To avoid the risks, you need an aggressive, proactive food safety management system that actively reaches every location and employee, provides them with detailed, step-by-step food safety protocols and training, accurately monitors and documents their compliance, and facilitates steady, ongoing improvements. This type of system provides the active control and feedback mechanisms you need to improve food safety across the board—including especially sensitive RTE foods. Of course, achieving this degree of active, ongoing managerial control over dozens (or hundreds) of locations is a significant undertaking. It requires a carefully planned, well-executed, and comprehensive program that features some key components and attributes. These include:

- A complete, written food safety plan that includes detailed and well-defined Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the safe handling of RTE and other types of foods.
- An effective, ongoing training program for both local managers and front-line employees. Manager-level training should provide all of the information managers need to implement and maintain your food safety plan—and take effective corrective actions. The frontline training should

communicate and reinforce food safety guidelines and procedures and teach employees why those procedures are important, especially when it comes to RTE foods.

- Food handling tools and resource kits that individual locations can use to reinforce your food safety SOPs and promote compliance. This includes simple, display-ready signage with specific step-by-step instructions for preparing RTE and other foods, proper rotation and labeling, sanitation and hygiene rules, and so on.
- Consistent and unified monitoring, testing, and internal auditing to observe and measure specific operational steps and perform regular quality checks. Ideally, this involves a technology solution that is capable of supporting and facilitating efficient monitoring and auditing processes.
- Accurate documentation and record keeping to verify compliance and enable continuous improvement. This makes it possible to establish accurate benchmarks, track continuous improvement at individual locations and at the corporate level, and identify locations that are not meeting food safety standards. Again, technology is an essential component of this type of closed-loop tracking and improvement solution.

The core elements of this type of complete active management control system break down into two main categories.

The first involves a unified and sustained corporate effort to develop and manage a comprehensive food safety plan, train local managers and employees to follow it, and provide them with the tools and resources they need to be successful.



The second category, which focuses on monitoring, auditing, documenting, and benchmarking, typically involves finding and implementing a technology solution that can enable and support those activities, both at the corporate level and at all of your individual locations. That may, at first, seem like a tall order. However, the recent convergence of two important technology trends—cloud and mobile—provide intriguing new options for making an advanced, next-generation food safety auditing solution affordable and relatively easy to implement, either as an extension of your existing quality control, brand consistency, or financial auditing framework or as a standalone food safety auditing solution.

Using Auditing Technology to Achieve Active Managerial Control

Regardless of whether you choose to build an auditing solution that's dedicated exclusively to food safety management or make food safety controls part of your broader auditing framework, you need an auditing technology platform that possesses some crucial characteristics and capabilities:

- **Speed and Mobility**—A cloud-based auditing system with a strong mobile component allows your local managers to use their smartphones or tablets to conduct RTE and other types of food safety audits—and then send the results to a centralized cloud-based engine where they instantly become part of a centralized body of knowledge.
- **Intelligence**—Collecting and making food safety auditing information available quickly is important, but it's not enough. Your solution should also be able to recognize important food safety issues or problems

as they occur, compare results from specific locations to a larger body of company-wide results, and automatically initiate action. This kind of machine intelligence essentially connects individual food safety auditing results to your larger food safety standards and processes, so you can quickly turn food safety data into company-wide improvements.

- **Flexibility and efficiency**—Achieving consistent food safety compliance involves monitoring and tracking hundreds of ever-changing details across all of your different locations. This requires an auditing foundation that's flexible enough to accommodate high levels of complexity.

With the right kind of cloud-based auditing foundation, you make it possible for the appropriate people and teams to quickly create, modify, and manage a centralized collection of food safety checklists and instructions, so local managers and employees always have access to the latest food safety standards and information.

- **Control**—Every auditing process, including food safety, involves teams of people filling many different roles. For your food safety auditing system to function properly, you need the ability to grant very specific access rights to people and groups based on those roles. For example, with the proper controls in place, you can give local managers access to their own customized sets of tools and information.

You can also give people at the corporate level permission to create and modify food safety questions and instructions that are limited to their job functions. In other words, by building fine-grained access control into your food safety auditing solution, you can easily add questionnaires, reports, and other resources that focus exclusively on



food safety—without getting in the way of other core auditing functions like facilities safety or regulatory compliance.

The bottom line is that when you deploy the right kind of mobile, cloud-based auditing solution, you create a platform that allows you to quickly create virtually any type of custom survey or checklist, make them easily

accessible to specific people or groups in your organization, collect the results in nearly real time, and thoroughly analyze them to gain new insights. This workflow is obviously ideal for monitoring and improving your food safety efforts, but you can also apply it to virtually any auditing or continual improvement function.

RizePoint—YOUR COMPLETE NEXT-GENERATION AUDITING SOLUTION

RizePoint has spent more than a decade designing, building, and perfecting a solution that includes all of the characteristics and capabilities you need to unlock all the benefits of a complete next-generation auditing solution—quickly and affordably.

THE RIZEPOINT SOLUTION INCLUDES:

- A powerful mobile app that makes it easy for auditors, local general managers, and other users to conduct and complete audits, assessments, and surveys—and upload the results—directly from their mobile devices.
- A secure and capable cloud-based engine that stores, processes, and analyzes audit and assessment data in nearly real time.
- Advanced survey building capabilities that allow anyone in your organization to create and update sophisticated conditional surveys with more than ten question types—and then make them instantly available to specific users.
- A sophisticated rules engine that carefully monitors incoming data, quickly identifies potential issues and problems, and automatically alerts the appropriate people.
- Built-in business intelligence that analyzes and transforms raw assessment data into valuable business insights within minutes.
- Flexible reporting capabilities that allow you to get the right information to the right people—in the form that's most relevant and meaningful.
- Granular access control that allows specific people and groups to create, distribute, and access specific evaluation forms, information, and reports—and nothing else.
- An advanced administration console that brings business-wide access management, form administration, alerts, filtering, reporting, remediation, and other functions together into one convenient location.



Powered by RizePoint

14 of 15 Questions Answered, Score = 100.00%

Categories Search

1 Date
Question type not scored!
04/19/2016

1 Time
Question type not scored
12:19 PM

1 Regular text - No Width Constraint
Question type not scored
Regular text question

Regular text 3-Character Limit
Question type not scored
ab3

1 Extended Text, Max 219 chars
Question type not scored
富士山エリア - Japanese, 万里长城 - Great Wall (of China), AaBcCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLlM

1 Text Combobox
Question type not scored
Newton's and Kepler's Law

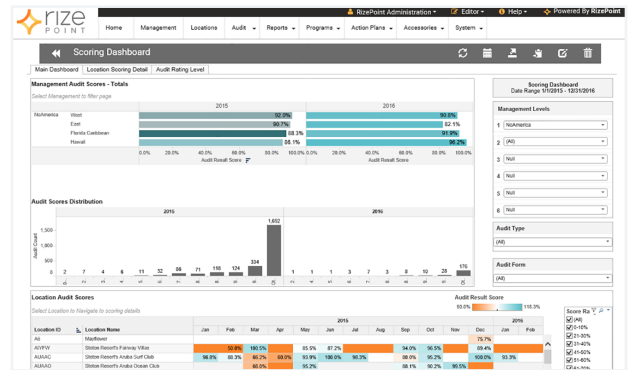
1 Global Combo Box
Question type not scored
Jelly Beans

1 Require Signature Critical Non-Compliant
ReqSig NoSig

1 Numeric text 1-10 Min-Max, Precision=1
(1-6.9: NonCompliant, 7.0-7.9: Compliant, >=8: Informational)
7.5

1 Temperature, -111 - 111 Min-Max, Precision=2
(below 67=Incorrect, Range 68-78=Correct, over 79=Informational)
76.54

The intelligent RizePoint Mobile App makes it easy to conduct audits and assessments.



The RizePoint solution includes advanced custom reporting capabilities, so you can always deliver the right information to the right people.

View Results Dashboards Self-Assessment Management Locations Print Form Contact Us Resource Library

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News Group 1

- RizePoint: Compliance Management Software for the Enterprise

News Group 2

- Are your properties measuring up? With RizePoint software, you can align your operations with your performance standards

News Group 3

- Strengthen Brand Consistency Where Customer Interactions Are Most Critical

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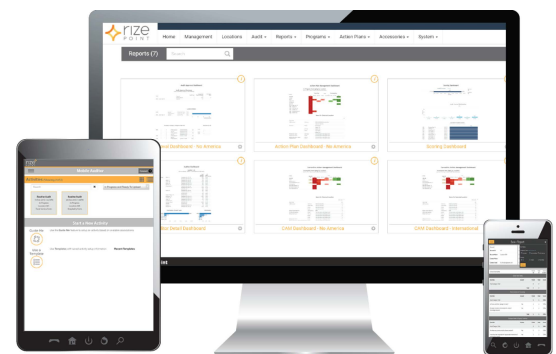
Today's Hospitality News

- Worleyparadise Hotel Group Expands Presence in Oman With Two New Hotels, Ramada Encore and Ramada Hotel & Suites
- Are High-Tech Hotels Alluring or Alienating? - Wall Street Journal
- Weakening Spring New Reservation Demand Produces Cloudy Outlook for Hoteliers
- Spending Your Work Day Browsing Social Media?

The RizePoint Administration Console allows you to manage every aspect of your auditing solution from one location.

START EXPANDING YOUR AUDITING VISION TODAY

Audits and assessments are a necessary, unavoidable obligation and requirement for virtually every multi-unit food service or hospitality organization. But by tapping into the latest mobile and cloud technology, you can transform the way you conduct and respond to audits and assessments—and then go even further by using your next-generation auditing solution as the launching pad for important new business initiatives and opportunities.





- Over 285,000 users
- 1.67 million audits per year
- 27,000 hotels and resort properties
- 120 countries and territories
- 39 languages supported

**FIND OUT HOW RIZEPOINT CAN HELP YOU
IMPROVE YOUR OPERATION TODAY.**

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call **1.888.313.7095**
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