

Food Safety and the Weights and Measures Inspector

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As inspectors, we conduct scale inspections to make sure devices are legal for use, and net content inspections so we can ensure the weight stated on the package is accurate, and within the legal MAV to be sold. When you walk into a store to start your inspection, you make sure you have all your equipment with you, but do you? How many of us don't think about food safety. Per the CDC, they estimate that 1 million people per year get sick from contaminated food. Cross contamination is the contamination of a food product from another source. There are 3 main ways cross contamination can occur that we as inspectors should be aware of. In NIST HB 133, Section 1.6, Health and Safety, it states "This handbook cannot address all of the health and safety issues associated with its use. The inspector is responsible for determining the appropriate safety and health practices and procedures before starting an inspection." Let's take a look at a few ways that can affect our inspections.

Food to Food:

Food can become contaminated by bacteria from other foods. This type of cross-contamination is especially dangerous if raw foods come into contact with cooked foods. When doing a net content inspection, it might be a good idea to wipe down your scale before you start, and during your inspection, especially after inspecting poultry, raw meat, pork products, and seafood with a disinfectant that is safe for your equipment, BUT also food safe.

People to Food:

People can also be a source of cross-contamination to foods. Some examples are handling foods after using the bathroom without first properly washing hands, **or inspecting raw meats** then going right to vegetables without washing hands between tasks. Make sure you use the proper gloves when handling raw products is always a good idea to keep the food and the consumer safe, and again having disinfecting wipes with you to wipe everything down.

Equipment to Food:

Contamination can also be passed from equipment to food. This type of contamination occurs because the equipment was not properly cleaned and sanitized between each use. Testing a scale in the meat department, placing your weights back in the box then going to produce section to inspect a scale without wiping down your weights, then placing them right back in your box, you now have equipment that was not properly cleaned and disinfected that you are going to use at another location that now can possibly cause equipment to food cross contamination.

Per FDA.gov, as of 4/11/23, there has been 78 food recalls because of contamination. Let's make sure that we don't contribute to that growing number.