



PART OF THE 2022 SERIES

# Top 10 Food Safety Challenges

## CONVENIENCE STORES

Convenience stores are ramping up their food offerings to meet consumer needs. With that come new challenges in food safety. The most common challenges observed by Steritech in more than 3,400 assessments in the first 7 months of 2022 indicate that vendor management, thorough staff training, and investments in routine maintenance can go a long way toward improving food safety.



### 01 | Non-TCS expired food

Even if foods are not controlled for time/temperature (TCS), they must still be pulled from shelves when they reach their expiration date. This includes items such as snacks, canned food, sodas, and even fountain soda syrups, which are often overlooked. Many of these are vendor managed foods, so establish strong relationships with vendors to get ahead of issues.



### 02 | Cleanliness of nonfood-contact surfaces

Even when surfaces don't contact foods, their cleanliness can affect food safety because of the potential for cross-contamination. The most commonly cited items in this category include cooler handles; food equipment knobs, buttons, and handles; and beverage centers. Assign cleaning responsibility for specific areas to specific team members to prevent problems.



### 03 | General facility cleanliness

The cleanliness of floors, walls, and ceilings in a convenience store is critical to preventing cross-contamination. Don't ignore floors under hard-to move equipment, like reach-in coolers, where debris, trash, grease, and food can build up or walls and floors in customer foodservice areas. Establish a designated cleaning schedule by area and stick to it.



### 04 | Expired food

It is absolutely critical to carefully manage time/temperature controlled for safety foods, as dangerous pathogens can multiply if left out too long. This includes pizza, hot dogs, burgers, pre-made sandwiches, and dairy products. Appoint a dedicated foodservice person to check these items and use timers and logs to help keep these items safe for consumption.



### 05 | Cleanliness of food-contact surfaces

Keeping food-contact surfaces clean prevents cross-contamination. That's obvious when it comes to knives and cutting boards, but be sure to establish cleaning schedules for surfaces that frequently get overlooked. The top culprits in convenience stores include: beverage center ice machines/dispensers and soda nozzles, slush machines, and coffee makers.



### 06 | Condition of non-food contact surfaces

Even surfaces that don't contact food can pose a risk to food safety. When items become damaged, they can be difficult to clean, harbor pathogens, or pose physical contamination risks. Watch out for these frequently cited items: cutting boards, cooler/refrigeration gaskets, equipment handles, shelving, and knobs and buttons.



### 07 | Pest entry and harborage

Pests pose significant food safety risks for facilities, so it's important to correct issues and perform routine maintenance to keep flies, ants, mice, rats, and other insects out. Other tips for success: clean up spills immediately, install door sweeps to prevent pests from crawling in, repair leaks, replace missing grout, and have pest management service performed monthly.



### 08 | Exterior garbage storage

In a recent Steritech convenience store study, 46% of locations had dumpster areas that scored below excellent. Improper management of garbage can attract flies, birds, rodents, and other disease-carrying pests to a facility. To avoid issues, tie garbage bags tightly, close dumpster lids, ensure drain plugs are in place, and keep dumpster areas clean.



### 09 | Food protection, general

When being stored or held, food must be covered or protected to prevent contamination. This is often cited when foods are put into walk-in and reach-in coolers without being covered, exposing them to dust or dripping moisture from ceilings, condensers, or fans. This moisture can carry harmful pathogens. Ensure all staff members understand this food safety risk.



### 10 | Cold holding

To prevent the growth of dangerous pathogens, foods that must remain cold must be held at 41°F or below. For c-stores, this is an issue in food prep areas where items such as lettuce, tomatoes, and cheeses go out of an issue. Stock wells in smaller batches and perform regular temperature checks. It's also important to monitor dairy products at coffee stations.

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