



HACCP

The Food Employee Perspective

by Melissa Vaccaro, MS, CHO

Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points, often referred to as HACCP, is really not as hard to implement and practice as we perceive it to be. Generally, most food employees and even many managers will be involved in monitoring food in the facility; they probably won't be developing the HACCP plan from scratch. Employees need to understand that the HACCP plan is in place to ensure that food prepared in the facility is safe to consume.

Basically stated, HACCP is defined as a systematic approach to identify, evaluate, and control food safety



hazards. HACCP focuses on prevention and control of food safety problems at highly specific (and controllable) points in the food flow.

HACCP plans should be specific for each operation and individual food flow process. Many large food facilities and chains have experts available to develop and implement HACCP systems. Smaller establishments may require assistance from university extension programs, industry associations, consultants, and government agencies for developing their plans; then they will actively



SEVEN PRINCIPLES TO ENSURE FOOD PREPARED IN YOUR FACILITY IS SAFE TO CONSUME

do the monitoring, corrective actions, and recordkeeping of the HACCP plan themselves.

HACCP is not a stand-alone program. HACCP systems are built upon a firm foundation of compliance with current Good Retail Practices (GRPs) and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). GRPs and SOPs are the prerequisite programs that work in conjunction with the HACCP plan. The GRPs and SOPs that employees are being asked to follow help control the retail environment, maintenance of facilities, or employee practices. With these in place,

the HACCP plan can focus on controlling details and the safety of the food.

HACCP is based on the following seven principles:

PRINCIPLE 1: HAZARD ANALYSIS

A **food hazard** is any unacceptable contamination by a biological, chemical, or physical agent at a sufficient level to cause a food to be unsafe for human consumption. By far the most common agents are biological, mainly pathogenic bacteria, other microorganisms, and parasites.

Your HACCP plan will list the hazards associated with the food you are preparing. These will not typically be developed by an employee; they will simply be available to the employee in the HACCP plan. These do not need to be memorized by the food employee. The hazards are identified to set the stage for the upcoming steps.

PRINCIPLE 2: CRITICAL CONTROL POINTS

A **critical control point** (CCP) means a point or procedure where loss of control could result in an unacceptable health risk. In a HACCP plan, these CCPs will be identified for you. CCPs are those processes or operations which can eliminate hazards or identify where hazard prevention or reduction can occur. CCPs must be met in order to eliminate, prevent, or reduce a hazard.

Food employees should know what steps in the process they are doing are CCPs. Not to downplay other steps in a process, but CCPs are steps the employee *must* pay close attention to and get right.

PRINCIPLE 3: CRITICAL LIMITS

A **critical limit** (CL) is a safe limit or tolerance that must be met for each identified CCP. These are the boundaries of safety for the microbiological, chemical, and physical hazards. Exceeding these boundaries indicates that a health hazard may exist or could develop. The employee needs to understand that these limits must be met in order to assure safe food.

The most obvious examples of critical limits are cooking temperatures. Cooking is identified in a HACCP plan as a CCP. In order to kill Salmonella (the hazard) in chicken, it must be cooked to 165°F or above for 15 seconds (critical limit).

Critical limits will be identified for each CCP, and these critical limits will be realistic and *measurable* and must be met.

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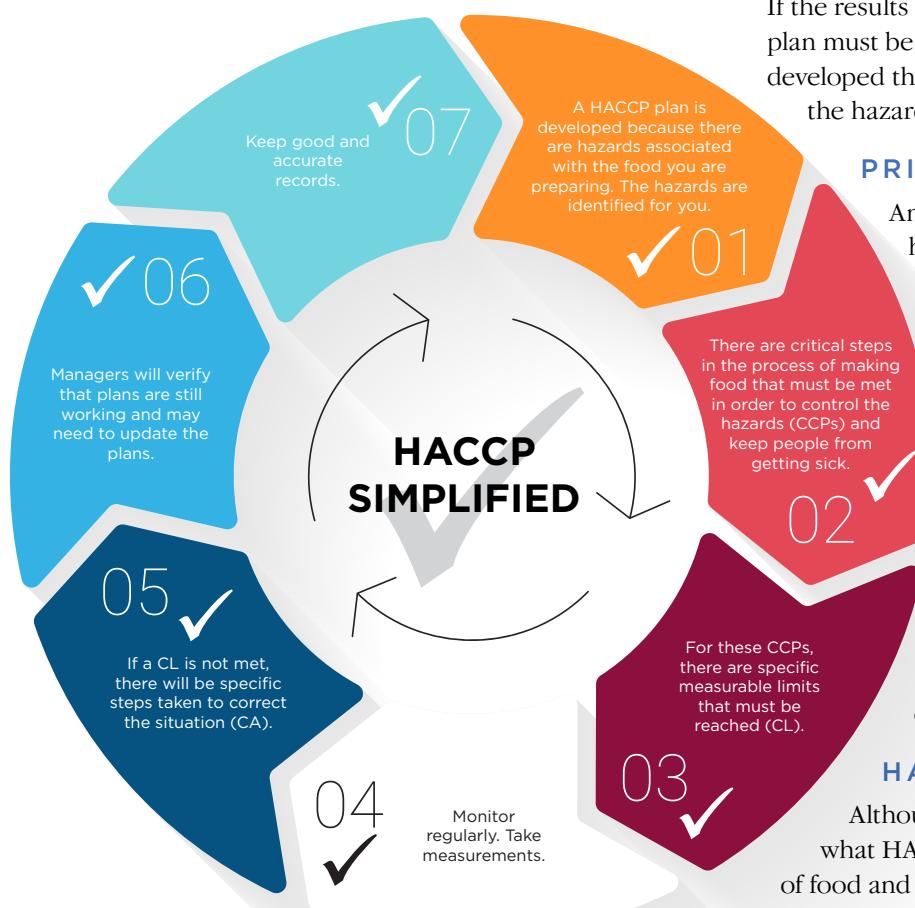


PRINCIPLE 4: MONITORING

Monitoring is a scheduled observation or measurement of a CCP and its limits. The purpose of monitoring is two-fold: to gauge whether a CCP is under control, and to generate numbers that will be used to produce an accurate record for future verification. Monitoring procedures will be accurate and done at established frequencies. Monitoring by a food employee might be taking the temperature of one piece of cooked chicken from each batch with a calibrated thermometer and noting this final cook temperature on a log sheet.

PRINCIPLE 5: CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

A **corrective action** (CA) is a procedure followed when a critical limit is not met. Corrective actions must be taken whenever monitoring indicates that limits are unmet. Such action must be immediate to assure that the situation is rectified. The HACCP plan will dictate what specific options are available as a corrective action for each noted CCP step in the process. It will then require that



the employee log in the HACCP plan logs what corrective action was taken.

Corrective action might include the following: notifying a supervisor, shutting down the process line, reprocessing, adjusting process temperatures and times, rejecting raw materials or ingredients, and holding or recalling product in distribution.

PRINCIPLE 6: VERIFICATION PROCEDURES

A working HACCP system is dynamic, flexible, and allows for change. It should have provisions for **verification** of its effectiveness. This is typically done by management, owners, or directors—not employees. They will review the HACCP plan and verify that:

- The CCPs and CLs are being adequately controlled and monitored.
- The procedures for product deviations and record keeping are being followed correctly.

If the results of verification identify problems, the HACCP plan must be modified, typically by the person who developed the plan, to ensure the HACCP plan controls the hazards.

PRINCIPLE 7: RECORD KEEPING

An adequate **record keeping** system is the heart of a successful HACCP program. This is why managers will harp on employees to fill out the records accurately and correctly.

Records are the documentation needed to verify effectiveness of the HACCP plan. They are the only reference available to trace the production history of a finished product. If questions arise concerning the product, a review of the records may be the only way to determine or prove that the product was prepared and handled in a safe manner in accordance with all the HACCP principles outlined in the establishment's HACCP plan.

HACCP FOR EMPLOYEES

Although it is ideal that employees have training on what HACCP means, how it affects their job, the safety of food and public health, it is more important that they know how to implement their parts of the HACCP plan

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correctly. It is not vitally important that employees know every hazard associated with the process they are doing, but instead, know the critical control points, critical limits, and corrective actions associated with their tasks.

Employees need to know that specific steps in the processing of food have been identified as a very important step (CCP), that at these steps there are limits that must be met (CL), and if these limits are not met they need to take specific steps to correct the situation (CA). They should know that nothing is perfect all of the time, which is why we monitor our processes. At some point something will go wrong and a CL will not be met. They should not fear retribution, but instead should be commended for identifying that a CL at a CCP has not been reached. Employees should understand the importance of monitoring and keeping good and accurate records for their managers, director, or owners so the HACCP plan

can be accurately validated, reviewed, and available should questions arise.

Don't let a HACCP plan overwhelm you or your food employees. Some plans have a lot of supporting documentation, GRPs, and SOPs that may make it look like a medical journal. If you focus on your specific responsibilities in ensuring food safety, then HACCP implementation will seem less intimidating. **E**



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Review Questions

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1. A HACCP plan is based on how many principles?
 - A. 6
 - B. 7
 - C. 8
2. Which principle below would be more important for an employee to understand?
 - A. Verification
 - B. Hazard analysis
 - C. Critical control point
3. Which principle is often done by a manager or director?
 - A. Critical limit
 - B. Monitoring
 - C. Verification
4. A critical limit is:
 - A. Something that can be measured
 - B. A point that is critical to monitor
 - C. A record that must be kept
5. A critical control point is:
 - A. A limit that must be met
 - B. A point in a process that must be controlled
 - C. A validation record that must be measured
6. What documentation is needed to verify effectiveness of the HACCP plan?
 - A. Records
 - B. Monitoring
 - C. Hazard
7. A corrective action is:
 - A. A limit that must be met
 - B. A procedure followed when a critical limit is not met
 - C. A point in the process that must be controlled

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