

Reduced Oxygen Packaging

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What's New at the Department of Health

Barb Rogers, food service senior sanitarian, retired last fall after more than 20 years of service to Livingston County.

Sanitarian Katie Harding will be joining Kevin Dyke in the food service program. Some of you may already know Katie as she has worked in other program areas with the Center for Environmental Health over the past several years.

Congratulations, Barb! We'll miss you!

Did you know that food service operations are prohibited from vacuum sealing food without a special waiver? It's true! Using reduced oxygen packaging improperly is a **critical violation**, meaning it presents an immediate threat to public health.

With the falling cost of vacuum sealing equipment and the rising popularity of new cooking techniques like *sous vide*, reduced oxygen packaging is taking off in the restaurant world. Many don't know that this seemingly simple technique comes with its own risks and its own set of regulations.

When food is packaged with reduced oxygen

(either by vacuum sealing, cook-chilling, or using modified atmosphere), different pathogens can begin to thrive. Especially concerning are the bacteria that cause botulism (*Clostridium botulinum*) and listeriosis (*Listeria monocytogenes*). Both of these bacteria grow well in environments with low oxygen. Because ordinary spoilage bacteria grow poorly in this environment, the food might not look or smell "bad" even when it harbors these deadly germs.

So does this mean restaurants can't use vacuum sealing at all? Not necessarily. New York State has provided guidance to local health

departments showing how reduced oxygen packaging can be used safely. The Livingston County Department of Health is here to answer your questions and help you through the process of applying for this waiver. Contact us **BEFORE** you purchase new equipment and we'll show you the way!



The Center for Environmental Health Online!

The Livingston County Department of Health is continually updating our online offerings to best serve our operators and the public. In 2018 we updated the Food Service websites with lots of the forms, guidance documents, codes, and information that operators might need. You

can also find previous issues of "Food for Thought" there—in case you didn't save them all in your scrapbook!

We want to keep improving our online resources, so please contact us if you have suggestions for what you'd like to see on our site!





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**LIVINGSTON COUNTY
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Risky Business

The New York State Department of Health asks the local health departments to categorize its Food Service Establishments (FSE) based on foods and population served, and prioritize inspections focusing on items that may potentially contribute to foodborne illness.

Since all FSE's do not present the same risk of causing foodborne disease, they may be separated into three categories: high, medium and low risk. These listings do not mean that one FSE is less safe than another, but rather that the nature of their menu and population served creates a greater potential for a foodborne illness to occur.

Epidemiological experience has demonstrated that menu items that require a great deal of processing on the premises, such as manual handling, cooling, re-heating, holding for service (hot or cold), transportation of meals and preparation of meals in

advance are common vehicles of foodborne illness. As such, FSE's that operate in this way are given a "high risk" designation.

FSE's whose menu items are focused around cook and serve with minimal handling and which have a rapid turn over of food are often given a "medium risk" determination. They may in fact serve a large volume of food (like fast food restaurants), but the foodborne illness risk of the menu items is lower.

The final category of "low risk" is given to those FSE's that serve food that does not require much in the way of cold holding or cooking (like ice cream stands or coffee shops).

The LCDOH will continue to review menu items and processing techniques with operators to ensure accuracy with a FSE's risk category designation.

Food Worker Training

Online Food Workers Course

The Livingston County Department of Health is now accepting an **online** Food Worker Training Certification! This course may be completed at anytime and will be equivalent to attending one of our in-person courses. For more information, visit our website:

<https://www.livingstoncounty.us/1019/Food-Worker-Training>

Please note that there is \$10 fee for the online course which is paid directly to the third party course provider. The LCDOH will continue to offer in-person trainings free of charge at our regularly scheduled times.

In-Person Food Workers Courses

Wednesday, March 27, 2019

6:00 PM to 9:00 PM

Thursday, March 28, 2019

9:00 AM to 12:00 PM

PRE-REGISTRATION IS A MUST!!

Space is limited and classes fill up quickly. Please register on or before March 22, 2019 by calling the LCDOH at (585) 243-7280 or by email to: sbennett@co.livingston.ny.us

All courses are being held at the Livingston County Highway Department at the Hampton Corners Complex on Gypsy Lane.

At least one employee from each food establishment must have a current certificate from an approved Food Workers Course. Please call the LCDOH for more details regarding approved courses.