



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Health

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STATE HEALTH COMMISSIONER

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September 29, 2006

## MEMORANDUM

PIM #06-03

TO: District Directors  
Environmental Health Managers  
Division of Food and Environmental Services Staff

FROM: Gary L. Hagy, Director  
Division of Food and Environmental Services

SUBJECT: Cut Tomatoes as PHF

The attached PIM addresses the re-classification of cut tomatoes as a potentially hazardous food (PHF). This PIM is based on information provided by the Food and Drug Administration and information from the Conference for Food Protection.

This PIM classifies cut tomatoes as PHF, which requires temperature control. Implementation of this PIM should take a phased-in approach, i.e., restaurants should be advised of this change before any violations are cited for cut tomatoes being out of temperature. Restaurants should be advised either through mass mailings, faxes, or during routine inspections.

Please insert this document in your PIM manual and distribute copies to all persons in your district working in your foodservice protection program. Please note that the effective date is October 1, 2006.

If you have any questions, please contact one of the food and dairy consultants.

Attachment

Program: Foodservice Protection

Subject: Cut Tomatoes as PHF

Issue: Do cut tomatoes need temperature control for safety?

Authority: Food Regulations § 12 VAC 5-421-10 Definitions “Potentially hazardous food”

Public Health Rationale:

Tomatoes provide adequate conditions for the growth of *Salmonella spp.*, the principal pathogen associated with foodborne outbreaks related to tomatoes. The water activity (0.99), nutrients and pH (4.2-4.8) of tomatoes support the growth of *Salmonella spp.* at temperatures above 5°C (41°F).

Background: In April, 2006, the Conference for Food Protection, which brings together representatives from food industry, government, academia, and consumer organizations, approved a recommendation to add “cut tomatoes” to the definition of potentially hazardous foods. This change recognizes the increased number of outbreaks and published studies which demonstrate that foodborne pathogens, primarily *Salmonella spp.*, survive on or in tomato fruits through the course of plant growth, flowering, fruit development, and maturation.

The current supply chain for tomatoes presents numerous points where natural contamination can occur. Irrigation water, manure, soil, and human handling are potential sources of *Salmonella spp.* contamination. Tomato stems and fruits are routinely subject to mechanical injury in the field and during post-harvest handling, which make them more susceptible to internalization of bacteria. Infiltration of pathogens can even occur during processing if flume water used to wash the tomato fruits is colder than the fruit itself by causing a “vacuum shrinkage” effect. Since the supply chain presents opportunities for survival of *Salmonella spp.* on tomato fruits, steps must be taken at the retail food establishment to limit the growth of these pathogens. By recognizing cut tomato fruits as potentially hazardous food requiring temperature control for safety, the growth of pathogens will be limited.

Interpretation: Once raw, whole tomatoes are cut, similar to cut melons, they are considered to be a potentially hazardous food requiring temperature control for safety. This includes sliced, chopped or diced tomatoes held by the food establishment for addition to sandwiches, salads, etc.

Responsibility: The local Environmental Health Specialist Senior is responsible for the application of this interpretation in foodservice establishments.

**PIM #06-03**

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COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Effective Date: October 1, 2006

Approved by:

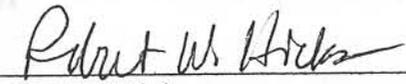
  
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Gary L. Hagy

Director

Division of Food and Environmental Health Services

Approved by:

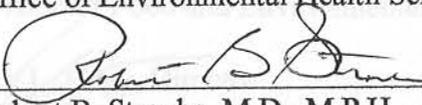
  
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Robert W. Hicks

Director

Office of Environmental Health Services

Approved by:

  
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Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H.

State Health Commissioner

SUBJECT: Out-Tempered as PFD

The attached PIM addresses the re-classification of out-tempered as a potentially hazardous food (PHF). This PIM is based on information provided by the Food and Drug Administration and information from the Conference for Food Protection.

This PIM classifies out-tempered as PHF, which requires temperature control. Implementation of this PIM should take a phased-in approach, i.e., restaurants should be advised of this change before any violations are cited for out-tempered being out of temperature. Restaurants should be advised either through mass mailings, faxes, or during routine inspections.

Please insert this document in your PIM manual and distribute copies to all persons in your district working in your foodservice protection program. Please note that the effective date is October 1, 2006.

If you have any questions, please contact one of the food and dairy consultants.

Attached