House Sanitation and Upkeep

The sanitation and maintenance of a house greatly impacts the health and safety of all individuals living in that house. Understanding how appliances are used and maintained correctly better enables an individual to care for an appliance and detect problems should they arise. The proper use of cleaning products and natural alternatives will improve house cleanliness as well as avoid contact with or poor use of products potentially harmful to an individual’s health. Discussions around rodents and insects can improve methods for preventing and combatting infestations. General information about food safety and storage increases the likelihood that food is being handled properly and thus reducing the possibility of health complications.

This informational booklet has been put together to serve as a conversation starter around house sanitation and upkeep. Information has been kept as simple as possible to allow for a general overview of housing issues. The checklist is meant to be used in an initial visit to evaluate current house sanitation and upkeep and then again in a subsequent visit to evaluate any changes that have taken place. Items that are a concern in a particular house should be discussed as the checklist is being used, to not only identify a problem but to offer practical solutions. Additionally, this checklist can help employers understand current house sanitation and upkeep problems exist and what they can do as employers to facilitate a safer and cleaner living environment for their employees.
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**Food refrigerated appropriately**

Refrigerators should be kept at a temperature of 40°F or less. A refrigerator that is at a temperature higher than 40°F could result in rapid growth of bacteria and harm food safety. Even only 20 minutes of a temperature greater than 40°F can cause bacteria growth. Food that needs refrigeration should not be eaten after it has been at a temperature of higher than 40°F for more than 2 hours. Food that should be refrigerated are:

- All cooked foods
- Raw meat
- Meat sandwiches
- Salads with meat
- Tuna and egg salads
- Milk, cheese, and yogurt
- Open cans of fruit or pudding
- Cut fruits and vegetables

Bacteria cannot be seen so food that has been left outside the refrigerator can seem fine but could cause a person to become sick upon eating it.

Alternately, if the food is refrigerated for a long time, in general, it won’t cause harm to anyone though it can lose its quality or smell bad.

Refrigerated or frozen food should be covered or wrapped to avoid it from dehydrating or ending up with bad smells.

Raw meat and seafood should be in a well-sealed container or wrapped safely to prevent any of the juice from contaminating other food.

In general, leftover cooked food can be kept for 4 days. On the other hand, raw ground beef, poultry, or seafood should only be stored for 1-2 days. Roasted meat, fillets, and chops can be stored for 3 to 5 days.

**Refrigerator and freezer closed tightly**

It is important to make sure the refrigerator and freezer doors are shut tightly. Only open the doors as necessary and close them as soon as possible. This will prevent thaw or increased temperatures in the refrigerator as well as save energy.

Appropriate meat thawing technique

Food is safe for an indefinite time while it is frozen. As soon as it begins to thaw and reaches a temperature higher than 40 °F it is possible that bacteria can start growing on the food.

Meat should never be thawed by leaving it out on the table. It should also not be thawed in hot water. It is dangerous to eat food that needs refrigeration after it has been outside of the refrigerator at temperatures higher than 40 °F.

There are three safe methods to thaw food: in the refrigerator, in cold water, and in the microwave.
- Thawing meat in the refrigerator requires planning since it is a slow process. For every 5 pounds of a large amount of food you need at least 24 hours. One pound of meat can take a day to thaw completely.
- Thawing meat in cold water requires a package or plastic bag without holes. (Holes let in bacteria or water). Put the bag in a bowl or container of cold water. Change the water every 30 minutes so that the food continues thawing. Once it is thawed completely food should be cooked right away.
- Thawing meat in the microwave can leave the food warm and therefore it is necessary to cook food thawed this way immediately. As soon as the temperature of the food in the microwave has increased there is the possibility of bacteria growth. All meat thawed this way should be cooked before refreezing.


Food covered and in its place

All food should be stored in glass, plastic, or metal containers. Food should not be stored on the floor and care should be taken to not store food where insects or rodents can enter.

No crumbs or food particles

Keep furniture free of crumbs and food particles (tables, shelves). Don’t feed the rodents and insects!

Properly discarded leftovers

Get rid of leftover food appropriately. Store left-overs that can be eaten later in the refrigerator. Put left-overs that will not be eaten in the compost or trash.

Clean sink and strainer in place

Keep the sink clean to avoid bacteria, mold, and germs. Use a strainer to avoid clogging the drain.

Clean Refrigerator

The refrigerator should be turned off and unplugged before cleaning it. Take out all the food, shelves, and anything else that can be removed. Clean the surface to remove crumbs and food particles. To remove mold from the interior of the refrigerator a mix of half white vinegar and half water can be applied and then rinsed off. Also, a basic mix of warm water with a few tablespoons of baking soda can be used. Make sure the refrigerator is rinsed and dry before returning the food. The outside of the refrigerator should be cleaned as well. A little dish detergent with warm water can be used to clean with a soft cloth. Rinse and dry.

To eliminate odors leave an open box of baking soda in the refrigerator.

Once the refrigerator is cleaned it should be maintained by cleaning spills immediately and throwing out food (already cooked or opened) that has been there for more than 1 week.

Clean Toilet

Leave a cup of distilled white vinegar for a few hours (or overnight). Scrub with a brush or rough cloth and flush.

Clean lavatory sink

Mix 3 tablespoons of baking soda with 1 tablespoon of water. Apply to the surface, leave for a few minutes, scrub with a brush or a rough cloth and rinse.

Clean shower/bathtub

Wet with a sponge of white distilled vinegar. Apply to all surfaces of the tub or shower. Leave for 5 minutes. Scrub with a brush. Rinse with clean water.

Lint filter

Before using the dryer, empty the lint filter. Also, make sure the escape valve lets air escape to the outside of the house. Clothes should not be left on top of the drier. Products to clean clothes should not be left on top of the drier because they can damage the surface.

Toilet paper in the toilet.

The septic system in the United States is designed for the use of toilet paper in the toilet bowl. (Unless the boss has said otherwise)

Dust on tables, shelves, and other surfaces

It is difficult to keep a house without dust but it is important to try. Surfaces can be cleaned with a moist cloth.

The stove

It is very important to keep the stove clean since with an accumulation of grease it is possible that the grease catches fire. To begin, surfaces can be cleaned with a mix of dish detergent and warm water. If there are still stains a mix of 1 tablespoon of water and 3 tablespoons of baking soda can be applied with a soft cloth. Rinse and dry. If the grease is not removed try to clean the surface with a product called lestiol, a product that can be found in the supermarket. To clean the inside, take out all the racks and bottom tray. So that it is easier, let the racks and bottom tray soak in warm water with dish detergent.

The flame of the stove, when lit, should be blue. If it is yellow an expert should be called to make sure there is not a problem with the gas.

Trash accumulation

Keeping a lot of trash in the house can result in bad odors and proliferation of insects and rats. If trash is collected only once a week, a large trash can with a lid should be kept outside where trash can be taken regularly.
Clean floor

If there is a vacuum, vacuum the floor regardless of whether it is wood covered with a carpet, or tile. If there is not a vacuum, a broom and dust pan can be used to clean the surface although it is very difficult to clean a rug that way. To clean parts of the floor where there are stains or bits of food will take a little more work. To clean a part of the floor or mop a wood or tile floor mix a half gallon of hot water with 2 tablespoons of a natural cleaning product like citrasolv. Hot water and with a little dish detergent works as well. Wet the mop but make sure to wring out the majority of the water before using it. After mopping the floor cleaning and wringing out the mop regularly, let the floor dry before walking on it. To clean stains in the carpet mix warm water with detergent or Citra Solve and apply it to the stain with a spray bottle or with little drops. With a brush (an old tooth brush works) or cloth, scrub the carpet. Clean the brush or cloth with warm water. Clean and wet the stain removing all the soap or cleaning product.

Eliminate infestations

- Cover all infestation entrances so that they can’t get in the house
- Do not feed the rodents and insects! Don’t leave food out, eliminate crumbs, don’t leave dirty plates in the sink, take out the trash!
- Put traps and use appropriate pesticides
- How to know if there are infestations and where
  - Look, listen, and observe
  - In dark places (any closet, cabinet, inside the walls)
  - Where there are entrances and holes
  - In warm places (any electrical appliance where there is a place to get in)
  - Where there is food (kitchens, trash cans)
  - Excrement
  - Nests

Mice and Rats

- Mouse traps- put a few against the wall so that the mice have to pass on top. Set them with something that mice like: peanut butter, raisin bread, bacon, or caramels.
- Get a cat as a pet
- Poison – there are a variety of poisons including warfarin, chlorophaconone y pival. Great care must be taken with any type of poison chosen because it is poisonous for people too. Put the poison in a place where mice go but never where there is human or pet food. Poison should be used for 6-10 days until there are no more signs of mice.

Adapted from: [http://www.health.state.ny.us/environmental/pests/ratsspan.htm](http://www.health.state.ny.us/environmental/pests/ratsspan.htm)

Roaches

- Do not store boxes, piled paper, or trash inside the house when it is not necessary. Eliminate places where roaches can hide.
- Don’t leave food or crumbs. Store it in containers with a cover or in the refrigerator.
- Don’t leave crumbs or food particles anywhere
- Cover trash cans and don’t let trash accumulate
- Wash bottles, cans, and food containers before throwing them in the trash.
Eliminate leaks in the sinks and shower (eliminate liquid so that the roaches don’t have anything to drink)

Pesticides are effective but harmful to health

- Sticky traps – can be purchased in stores
- Empty traps – clean well a container/bottle with a neck (like the mayonnaise bottle). Put Vaseline on the neck. Put a piece of banana peel at the bottom of the bottle. Leave it overnight where roaches have been seen. In the morning, put on the bottle lid and put it in the freezer for a few hours to kill the roaches.
- Use the vacuum – make sure the vacuum bag is well closed when it is thrown away.
- Insect bait – This can be found in supermarkets, pharmacies, and hardware shops. Use bait that contains hydramethylnon, fipronil, boric acid or sulfuramid as its active ingredient. Put it in places where the roaches walk. Change the bait frequently because when there is no more insecticide the roaches will return.
- Dusts – Boric Acid dust also kills roaches. Put thin layers in places where the roaches usually live. Be careful to not put it near human or animal food

Adapted from: http://lancaster.unl.edu/pest/resources/Roach120Spanish.shtml

Bed bugs

- Remove everything washable from the bed and all clothes of the people who sleep in the bed. Wash in hot water to kill the bed bugs. If there are things that cannot be washed put them in the dryer to kill the bed bugs.
- Examine the mattress looking for holes where the bed bugs can enter and exit. Cover holes if they are found (Duct tape!)
- Put the mattress outside in the sun for a few hours.
- It is almost always necessary to use insecticides to kill bed bugs that live inside the mattress. Many times even applying purchased insecticides do not solve the problem in which case it is necessary to call a professional. A product purchased in the super market can be used but make sure the directions are read carefully before using.
- If there are bed bugs in the bed it is possible they are in the sofa and other furniture too. All furniture should be inspected for bed bugs and their eggs.

Adapted from: http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/bedbugs/

Flies

Put screens on the doors and windows to be able to ventilate the house without letting in flies. Purchase fly swatters to kill flies that enter the house. Don’t leave food out. Clean crumbs and food particles. Take out the trash.

Mosquitos

Put screens on the doors and windows to be able to ventilate the house without letting in mosquitos. Eliminate stagnant water where it is found outside the house: receptacles, old tires, bottles, empty buckets, gutters, trash cans, and plumbing.
Dust mites

- Remove everything washable from the bed and all clothes of the people who sleep in the bed. Wash in hot water to kill the bed bugs. If there are things that cannot be washed put them in the dryer to kill the bed bugs.
- Put the mattress in the sun for a few hours
- Clean surfaces in the house regularly with a moist cloth
- Vacuum the rug and all furniture.

Adapted from: http://www.epa.gov/asthma/dustmites_sp.html

Fleas

- Wash with hot water all sheets from the bed, pet beds, and clothes of all who live in the house.
- Take out everything stored under tables, beds etc.
- Store or cover pet food.
- Vacuum every part of the house paying close attention to the corners, rugs, and underneath furniture.
- Make sure the vacuum bag is shut well before throwing it in the trash outside.
- If it is necessary to apply an insecticide make sure to purchase one that is to eliminate fleas. Furthermore, read and follow the directions carefully. Stay outside the house for the time indicated on the instructions.

Adapted from: http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/factsheets/flea-tick.html

Sheets

Putting sheets on the mattress makes it easier to keep clean the place where a person sleeps. Wash the sheets with hot water at least once a week. This helps kill fleas, bed bugs, and dust mites.

Light bulbs

Keep a few extra light bulbs in the house. They can be requested on a grocery list since they are found in most any supermarket.

Trash Cans

It is important to have trash cans in various places throughout the house. At least one should be in the kitchen, bedroom, and bathroom. Take out the trash at least once a week unless there is a lot in which case it should be taken out every few days.

Recycling

In the United States it is possible to recycle many things. It is important to do this to protect our environment. The following things can be recycled:

- Cardboard boxes
- Newspaper
- Tin cans
- Aluminum cans and glass beer bottles
- Plastic soda bottles
- Magazines
- Plastic milk bottles and water bottles
- Glass jars and containers

*There is a 5 cent refund per piece for returning soda and beer bottle and aluminum cans*

Food can be put in a composte pile or the farm owner might have a suggestion as food left overs are sometimes thrown in the manure pit.

**Curtains and blinds**

In order to have good air ventilation in the house it is best to have curtains or blinds to cover the windows if the occupants don’t want other people to see in the house. Thick things like blankets and cardboard don’t let air in. Curtains or blinds can be purchased or curtains are easily made with pieces of cloth.

**Screen doors**

Putting a screen on the door allows one to keep the door open for good ventilation without letting in flies, other insects, and rodents.

**Screen Windows**

Putting screens on the windows allows one to keep the windows open for good ventilation without letting in flies, other insects, and rodents.

**Windows**

Windows should easily open and shut to control ventilation and the temperature of the house. Additionally, in case of a fire or other emergency, it is important to have a window as an alternate exit.

**Fans**

Fans are important in keeping the house at an adequate temperature. They also are important in reducing air contaminants, humidity, and bad odors.

**Heat and cooling systems**

Know how to use the heating and cooling systems. This way the temperature of the house can be regulated well. Additionally, knowing how to use the system will eliminate over use which contributes to poor use of energy, financial and environmental costs.

**Entrances and exits**

All entrances and exits of the house should not be blocked since in an emergency such as a fire it is necessary to leave the house as quickly as possible.
Electric Wires

- Pay attention to the electric wires to make sure they are not exposed to avoid an electric shock or fire.
- The risk of a fire increases by having electric wire under things (like furniture or rug) and increased risk of electric shock if a wire gets wet or falls in water.
- Every once in a while pay attention to the electric wires to make sure they are not hot.
- Overloaded extension cords and outlets increase the risk of a house fire.

Smoke detector

A smoke detector should always be present between the bedrooms and other parts of the house. It should not be put in the kitchen or the garage to avoid it going off frequently when there is no danger. Always keep batteries in the smoke detector.

Carbon Monoxide detectors

Carbon monoxide detectors help detect odorless gas that sometimes is in a house due to car emissions, small gasoline motors, stoves, and heating systems. Breathing a lot of this gas could result in sickness or death.

Fire Extinguisher

Keep a fire extinguisher in the house and know how to use it. This can help put out a small fire.

Instructions for the boss or notes about the sanitation and maintenance of the house.