What are policies and why are they important?

Creating policies for a Food Safety Management System (FSMS) is an essential process to improve the operations of a restaurant. They have benefits such as reducing labor and product costs, improving decision making, reducing employee confusion, creating consistency in performing tasks, etc. Policies are designed to help employees and managers understand what the task is, how to perform the task, when to perform the task, and what the expected outcome of the task is supposed to be. When they are effectively implemented in an organization, they will be the road map to help all employees do tasks consistently.

When all employees in an organization are performing tasks consistently across the board, management will be able to use the data from recorded logbooks identify areas for improvement, identify gaps in the policy, and effectively manage food safety risks, to name a few.   The process for creating policies can be time consuming and will require continuous training to ensure employees understand and follow policies but once they are completed can be used to help train new employees and manage existing employees because all will be held to the same standard.

It is important to note that once a policy is created it is not the end of the process. They will need to be reviewed and modified on a periodic basis. Some reasons that could necessitate a review of a current policy are:

- • Changes to the Food Code
- • Changes to ingredients or suppliers
- • New equipment that is being used
- • Changes to menu items
- • New technology

As processes change in an organization, it is important to evaluate what effect these changes will have on the existing policies so they can be updated and implemented in the unit.

1. Purpose

This section defines what the expected outcome should be for the specific policy. This section does not need to be very long, but does need to convey exactly what the policy is expected to do

EXAMPLE:

A Cooking Foods Policy's Purpose.

To ensure all foods are cooked to the proper internal temperature to prevent foodborne illness

2. Scope

Defines who needs to follow the policy and perform the task. Those creating policies want to be aware of their operations and the expectations of their employees. If a company cross trains all employees on different functions this section could state, "all employees who cook and prepare hot foods." If the company has very specific job duties and does not cross train, this part may want to identify job titles or functions to create more clarity with employees.

3. Procedure

This portion of creating a policy is going to be the most extensive as it will detail the exact procedure that employees must follow to meet the requirements of the policy. This will provide a step-by-step process for completing a task.

- Identify the necessary training an employee would need to complete this task, such as being a ServSafe Certified Food Protection Manager or taking the ServSafe Food Handler course
- Evaluate the task being performed and work through the process. Try to identify situations that may need modifications, such as cooking foods that have a combination of meat products to cook to the highest required temperature or different processes such as cooling thick sauces compared to thin stock.
- Be as clear and concise with the procedures as possible; remember creating clear directions creates less ambiguity with employees
- Those writing the policy may want to work with employees who are performing the procedure on a consistent basis. They are the ones who are performing the job task and will be helpful to ensure all steps are covered.

4. Monitoring

This section will define the procedure employees must take to monitor a task. It is important to identify:

- How often the task should be performed
- The correct tools to use to perform the task
- Who should be performing the task

5. Corrective Action

This section will be used to help employees react if the product is out of specification. For instance, if the employee is cooling food and during the monitoring portion, the food is above 70 degrees in two hours, this section will provide them with the required action to correct the issue.

It is important to evaluate the operation and the different tasks that are being performed to identify areas that could be of concern and that would need to have corrective actions if the task is not within specified specifications.

6. Verification/Record Keeping

Now that employees know the procedure, how to monitor, and corrective actions, it is important to have them keep good records of the tasks they are performing. To make continuous improvements or to find issues with the process, managers need to understand what is happening with tasks to verify that they are working the way they were intended.

The record keeping process could be as simple as creating paper logbook and forms to using electronic copies. It is important to remember that the information received should be reviewed by managers to identify any reoccurring issues that need to be resolved by modifying a policy or adjusting the procedures.

When creating the logbook, it is also important to keep it relatively simple for employees to fill out, but with enough information that management can take action if there are issues. Suggested logbook items could be:

- Date
- Food Item
- Temp and Time
- Space for Corrective Actions taken
- Initials/Name of person performing the monitoring
- Manager/Supervisor initials/name for verification/approval
- Reasons for acting

As logbook templates are created it is important to think of each task and what is necessary to record.

7. Related Documents

This section is important to identify additional resources that could be used by employees or managers to help with the task. Examples could be:

- Training materials
- Recipe cards
- Additional policies/procedures

8. Key Words/Definitions

This section is good to ensure all employees are using and understanding key words in the same way to reduce confusion. This will be very helpful when training new employees who must process a lot of information.

Questions? Email foodsafety@restaurant.org. And find additional food safety tools and resources for your operation at www.FoodSafetyFocus.com.