



The Scoop on Ice Safety

It's probably the place most foodservice workers consider least likely to be harboring bacteria and germs, but the ice maker is actually one of the worst culprits for carrying both.

Almost every foodservice operation has at least one ice maker, and some have many. These are usually used by a number of employees and it's important that they are fully-trained on how to use them properly.

"We treat ice like food, so our employees all get training along the way," says Deborah Girvin, director of nutrition services for Good Samaritan Hospital in Dayton, Ohio. "We teach them to never touch the inside of the machine or the scoop, other than by the handle, and to always transport ice in a clean, covered container."

Tim Bauman, director of food and nutrition services at Wood County Hospital in Bowling Green, Ohio, has good reason to regularly train his employees on ice machine safety. "Our local health department looks at the ice machine every time they come in, particularly in the past two to three years," he says.

On common bin-type ice machines, among the most important things to consider to help ensure safe and pathogen-free ice is the seemingly innocuous scoop. If employees touch the scooping part they can transfer bacteria onto it, which then transfers to the ice and ultimately to guests' beverages. And it goes without saying that the scoop should never be dropped on the floor or improperly stored. Employees should also be prohibited from ever using a glass vessel to scoop ice; chipped or broken glass is virtually indistinguishable from ice.

Girvin prefers a plastic scoop "because it's cheaper than metal and holds up well," she says. The scoop is stored in a pocket on the side of the machine and is run through the dishwasher each night to be sanitized.

Plastic scoops are less expensive but don't last as long, "although they could if they aren't abused," says Michael Marino, assistant to the director of operations for Host America, a foodservice contractor based in Hamden, Conn. He prefers operations to keep the scoop in a covered pocket on the machine so dust doesn't fall on it, and the pocket itself is run through the dish machine regularly.



Ice machines are sturdy pieces of kitchen equipment and generally last upwards of 10 years. But, like most equipment, they need a little TLC. This includes:

- Regular and thorough cleaning. Girvin requires daily sanitizing of the ice chute, and also brings in an outside company once a year for complete machine, filter and pipe sanitizing. Simpson's foodservice employees sanitize the university's machines four times a year, but for a deeper clean, the university's maintenance department cleans the filters and the coils annually.
- Proper filtration. Water filters help ensure that the water going in is pure and that the ice is good-tasting. Filtration also extends the life of the ice machine by reducing mineral deposits.
- Regular de-liming. This helps ensure that ice machines work smoothly and efficiently, although good filters may mean this is redundant. San Diego Unified School District delimes regularly to remove calcification, says executive chef Mark Mendoza. "But we don't have much buildup because our machines are cleaned regularly," he says. Mendoza also shifts his machines into defrost mode every day "so the compressors don't freeze up at the back when they've cycled through the hot, humid air from the kitchen."