

This guide will help you decide which damaged, shelf-stable foods are safe to distribute to your clients. These guidelines apply to shelf-stable foods only. Do not use these guidelines for perishable foods (refrigerated or frozen foods). The information is based on Commonwealth of Massachusetts regulations and best practices of The Greater Boston Food Bank.

## Receiving

Look at all foods as you receive them. This will help you decide if the food is safe and should be kept. Do not keep unsafe foods to give to your clients. Storing unsafe foods could also lead to contamination of other foods. Inspect any damaged food, regardless of the source.

- Look at all your food items to make sure the packaging is not open or severely damaged.
- Look for signs of contamination, and pest infestation.

Follow the rule of thumb when evaluating damaged food: *When in doubt, throw it out!*

Acceptable food is not contaminated, has intact packaging, no signs of pest activity or infestation, within the acceptable safe date, and properly labeled. Every food label must include:

- name of the product
- ingredients listed in order by weight from most to least
- weight of the food inside the container (net weight)
- name and address of the manufacturer, packer, or distributor

Do not give out food missing any of this label information.

Use the Food Marketing Institute's *Food Keeper* brochure to help you determine the acceptable safe date of a food beyond its code date. Remember that the Food Keeper is written from a consumer retail standpoint. You may want to use shorter timeframes than those listed in the brochure. Copies of the brochure are available from the Nutrition Department or online at <http://fmi.org/consumer/foodkeeper/search.htm>.

Throw away any unacceptable food.

Destroy the food by making it inedible. One way to do this is to open the package and dump it directly into a trash bag. If you can not throw it out, separate it from safe food and clearly label it 'Destroy & Dump.'

Always perform a random check of safe food to test for quality.

## How to Store Shelf-Stable Foods

Keep dry storage areas, and shelf-stable foods, clean and dry.

Store your shelf-stable foods out of direct sunlight in a dry, cool area. Store your shelf-stable foods away from pipes, heating ducts, or water lines. Keep your storeroom temperature between 50°F -70°F and humidity between 50%-60%. Temperature and humidity extremes shorten the shelf life of foods. Make sure your storeroom is well ventilated. This will help maintain the correct temperature and humidity.

Store your shelf-stable foods away from chemicals, personal care products and household cleaning supplies. Never store chemicals above food.

Follow FIFO (First In, First Out)-a stock rotation system that makes sure products received first are distributed first. FIFO helps discourage pests from settling in your agency. Make sure your staff and volunteers understand how your FIFO system works. If there are dates on the packaging, distribute the oldest product first.

Store your shelf-stable food away from the walls (about 2") and at least six inches (6") off the floor. This allows cleaning around food and access for pest control.

Store cereals, grains, sugars, and flours in airtight containers. This helps retain freshness and guard against pest infestation.

Keep out-of-code foods separate from those within code. Display a sign that reads "Some of these products may be out of code, but are still sound and wholesome to consume." This signage is available from The Greater Boston Food Bank's Nutrition Department.

To control pests, use a licensed Pest Control Operator. Find one in your area and begin regular monitoring and extermination, if necessary.

Adapted from materials provided by:

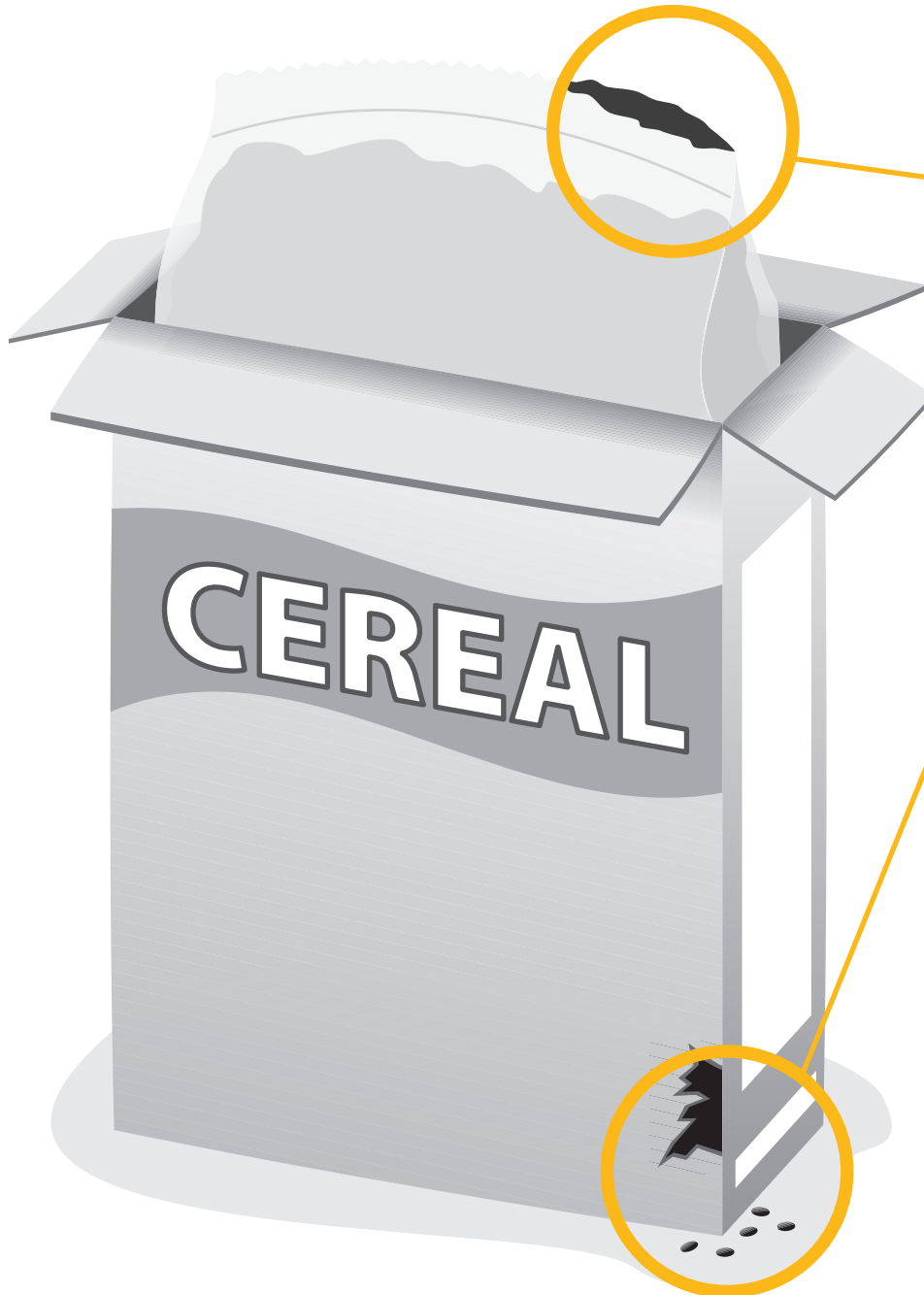
Feeding America (formerly known as America's Second Harvest)

Conference For Food Protection

Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Food Protection Program

Purdue University Cooperative Extension, Safe Food For The Hungry

# Evaluating Boxed and Dry Packaged Food Containers



## Throw out boxes with inner bags that have:

- Contaminants inside the boxes
- Torn, leaking or contaminated inner bags
- Inner bags with open seams or holes
- Mold or watermarks
- Signs of insects, including bugs in seams, holes, movement, egg cases, webs, body parts, or droppings
- Signs of rodents, including gnaw marks, droppings, or urine
- Dating past the acceptable safe date
- Missing labels or labels you cannot read

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## Throw out boxes without inner bags that have:

- Open tops or bottoms
- Mold or watermarks
- Signs of insects, including bugs in seams, holes, movement, egg cases, webs, body parts, or droppings
- Contaminants on the boxes
- Signs of rodents, including gnaw marks, droppings, or urine
- Dating past the acceptable safe date
- Missing labels or labels you cannot read

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## Throw out bags or sacks with:

- Rips, tears, punctures or holes
- Mold or watermarks
- Incomplete or incorrectly formed seals or seams
- Signs of insects, including bugs in seams, holes, movement, egg cases, webs, body parts, or droppings
- Signs of rodents, including gnaw marks, droppings, or urine
- Dating past the acceptable safe date
- Missing labels or labels you cannot read

## Additional Information:

If you suspect rodents, use a black light. Their urine, wet or dry, will glow under black light. If you need to borrow a black light, contact The Greater Boston Food Bank's Member Services Department.

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**BROWN  
SUGAR**

The illustration shows a grey bag of brown sugar. Two yellow circles highlight specific areas: one shows small white dots representing insect droppings, and the other shows a jagged black line representing a rodent's bite or tear. Two yellow lines point from the text on the right to these circles.

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## Throw out out glass or plastic bottles or jars with:

- Loose or broken caps
- Other signs the cap was opened
- Broken tamper-evident seals or other signs the cap was opened
- Foreign objects inside the container
- Unusual product separation
- Mold inside the container
- Dirt or other particles under the rim
- Signs of insects, including egg cases, body parts, webs, and droppings
- Signs of rodents, including gnaw marks, droppings, or urine
- Signs the container was wet
- Leaking screw tops
- Cracks or chips
- Home jarred foods
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## Throw out pouches with:

- Leaks, open seals, holes or punctures
- Cuts, cracks, or scratches deep enough to leak
- Mold or signs the package was wet
- Incomplete or incorrectly formed seals
- Foreign objects trapped inside pouch or interrupting the seal or seam
- Folds or wrinkles (can be caused by one side being longer than the other)
- Bulges on seams
- Inflation (blown up like a balloon)
- Signs of insects, including egg cases, body parts, webs, and droppings
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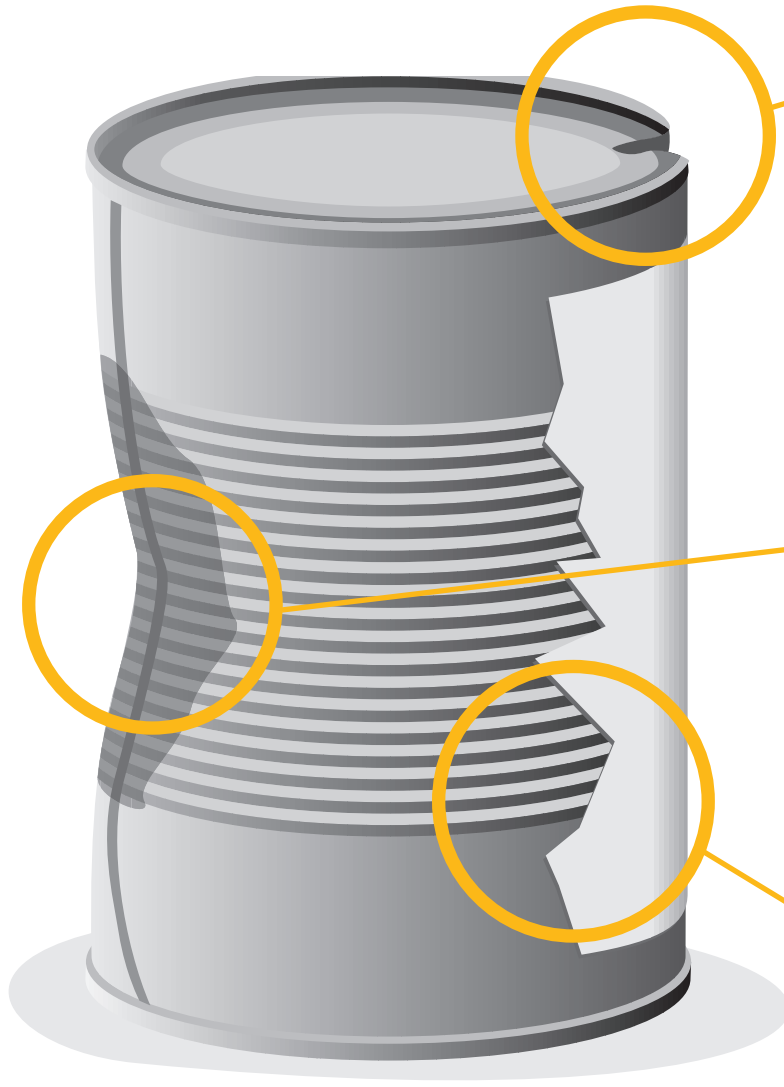
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## Throw out cans with:

- Dented or pinched top or bottom rim
- Deep dents that do not allow stacking (except for dry goods such as ground coffee, powdered drink mixes, and carbonated drinks)
- Swollen or bulging end, or an end that gives when pushed (except for dry goods such as ground coffee, powdered drink mixes, and carbonated drinks)
- Rust or soil that does not wipe off
- Mold or watermarks
- Exposure to temperature extremes (such as scorch marks, frost)
- Dents on the side seam
- Signs of insects, including egg cases, body parts, webs, and droppings
- Signs of rodents, including gnaw marks, droppings, or urine
- Leaks
- Stained labels
- Pits or pinholes
- Incorrectly welded seams
- Dirt under the pull-top
- Openings or dents on the score lines or rivets of pull-top cans
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