



BUILT FOR THE RUSH



FOOD SAFETY UNDER PRESSURE

By Brandon Willey

Most bowling operators do not have a food safety knowledge problem. They have a Saturday problem.

Everyone in the building may know the basics: label the food, wash hands, check temperatures, keep sanitizer buckets ready and do not guess about allergens. The challenge is building a system that survives a full house of leagues, back-to-back birthday parties, a compact kitchen and a part-time employee covering the make line during a rush.

Practical food safety systems help bowling entertainment centers stay compliant, protect guests and support part-time staff without creating unnecessary complexity.

The most effective systems are simple, visible, repeatable, and built into the daily rhythm of the operation.

I recently sat down with Nicole Holtzman of 4 Elements Hospitality to discuss what that looks like in a bowling center.

That environment makes food safety different in a bowling entertainment center. A restaurant employee may move between food, a hand sink, and a sanitizer bucket. A BEC employee may touch food, shoes, arcade cards, lane equipment, party supplies, tablets, and card readers, then return to food.

"If the food safety procedure assumes the person doing it only works in the kitchen, it will eventually fail," Holtzman says. "In a BEC, the procedure has to match the way the venue actually operates."

The answer is not to overwhelm part-time staff with complicated binders or restaurant jargon. It is to create systems that fit the operation employees are actually working in.

LABELING, DATING, AND ROTATION

Labeling and dating are among the easiest food safety systems to implement, but they only matter if they lead to action. Labeling is the input. Rotation is the output. A perfectly labeled walk-in where nobody rotates product is just documenting spoilage in permanent marker.

A practical label should include the item name, the date it was prepared or opened, the use-by date and the employee's initials. The "date opened" matters because many products are safe and shelf-stable until the package is opened. Once opened, the clock changes.

Prep dates apply to items made or portioned in-house, such as sliced tomatoes, portioned wing sauce, thawed chicken, or a party tray assembled before an event. Open dates apply to packaged products that were shelf-stable until opened, such as nacho cheese, dressing jugs, bulk pickles, or sauce bags.

Rotation is where many systems break down. First in, first out means the oldest product is used first, but FIFO often fails in bowling centers for a physical reason, not a training reason. During a rush, employees grab whatever is easiest to reach. If the newest case is at the front of the shelf, the shelf makes the decision.

Nicole Holtzman



MAKE ROTATION RUSH-PROOF

Four simple rules make proper rotation easier when volume builds:

- **New behind old.** Place new product behind older product.
- **Use a clean container.** Move fresh product into a clean container instead of topping off an old one.
- **Assign ownership.** Give one person responsibility for rotation with each delivery.
- **Run the reach test.** Grab the product as an employee would during a rush. If the newest item comes out first, fix the shelf layout.



LINE CHECKS THAT FOLLOW DEMAND

Line checks are pre-shift and pre-rush inspections that confirm the kitchen is ready for safe service. In a traditional restaurant, they often happen by the clock because the rush arrives during predictable meal periods. In a bowling center, the better trigger may be the booking system.

"BEC operators should think about line checks around party bookings, not just around opening time," Holtzman says. "Bookings should indicate when the rush is coming." A practical check should happen before opening, league traffic and weekend rushes, as well as about 60 minutes before the first major party block.

The check should be short enough to survive real operations. A five-minute line check can become a habit. A 15-minute line check is more likely to be skipped when the building gets busy.

The best line checks also double as training. A manager walking the line alone with a clipboard is conducting an inspection. Having the cook run the check out loud while the manager watches turns the same process into coaching.

TEMPERATURE LOGS THAT TRIGGER ACTION

Temperature logs protect guests and the business only when they lead to action. A log that records a problem but does not trigger a response is just paperwork.

Logs may cover walk-in and reach-in coolers, freezers, prep tables, hot-holding units, cooked products, reheated items, and food served at buffets or parties. Whether the format is paper or digital, it should include the date, time, item or equipment checked, recorded temperature, employee initials, corrective action, and manager review.

The most important training point is what happens when something is wrong. Employees should know they will not get in trouble for throwing out food that is out of date or outside the required temperature range, as long as it is tracked, communicated, and handled according to procedure. Otherwise, the fear of reporting waste can create a much larger problem.

TRAINING WITHOUT THE OVERLOAD

Part-time and full-time employees do not need to master every technical detail at once. They need clear expectations, repeated practice, and immediate correction when procedures are missed.

"Training should be station-specific and short," Holtzman says.

"Show the employee how to label products, then have them do it. Show them how to check a temperature, then watch them use the thermometer. Reinforce the answer during live shifts."

Training should also focus on the real risks created by cross-role work. Handwashing and glove changes are not abstract rules; they are the bridge between roles. In a BEC, employees may move between shoes, arcade cards, lane touchscreens, party rooms, food prep, and guest service.

The best training is not a one-time onboarding event. It is reinforced during pre-shift conversations, line checks, manager walkthroughs, and real guest situations. If an employee misses a step, correcting it in the moment helps connect the rule to the work.

Food safety doesn't have to be overhauled overnight. A tighter labeling system, line checks built around the booking schedule, or corrective action added to every temperature log can create an immediate difference.

The strongest systems are the ones that still hold up when Saturday night hits.



Brandon Willey, ICAE, is co-founder of the LBX Collective, founder and CEO of Premier LBX Group, host of The LBX Show, and founder of Perkiverse. A longtime leader in the attractions industry, he previously chaired IAAPA's FEC Committee and now serves on the North America Manufacturers and Suppliers Committee. Connect with him at [LinkedIn.com/in/bwilley](https://www.linkedin.com/in/bwilley).