

after closing machine adjustment (including adjustment for a change in container size).

(d) *Closure examinations for semirigid and flexible containers*—(1) *Heat seals*—

(i) *Visual examinations*. A closure technician shall visually examine the seals formed by each sealing machine. When sealing defects are observed, necessary corrective actions, such as adjusting or repairing the sealing machine, shall be taken and recorded. In addition to examining the heat seals, the entire container shall be examined for product leakage or obvious defects. Visual examinations shall be performed before and after the thermal processing operation with sufficient frequency to ensure proper closure. These examinations should be conducted at least in accordance with a statistical sampling plan. All defects noted and corrective actions taken shall be promptly recorded.

(ii) *Physical tests*. Tests determined by the establishment as necessary to assess container integrity shall be conducted by the closure technician at a frequency sufficient to ensure proper closure. These tests shall be performed after the thermal processing operation and should be made at least every 2 hours of continuous production. The establishment's acceptance guidelines for each test procedure shall be on file and available for review by Program employees. Test results along with any necessary corrective actions, such as adjusting or repairing the sealing machine, shall be recorded.

(2) Double seams on semirigid or flexible containers shall be examined and the results recorded as provided in paragraph (b) of this section. Any additional measurements specified by the container manufacturer shall also be made and recorded.

(e) *Container coding*. Each container shall be marked with a permanent, legible, identifying code mark. The mark shall, at a minimum, identify in code the product (unless the product name is lithographed or printed elsewhere on the container) and the day and year the product was packed.

(f) *Handling of containers after closure*. (1) Containers and closures shall be protected from damage which may cause defects that are likely to affect

the hermetic condition of the containers. The accumulation of stationary containers on moving conveyors should be minimized to avoid damage to the containers.

(2) The maximum time lapse between closing and initiation of thermal processing shall be 2 hours. However, the Administrator may specify a shorter period of time when considered necessary to ensure product safety and stability. A longer period of time between closing and the initiation of thermal processing may be permitted by the Administrator.

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§ 381.302 Thermal processing.

(a) *Process schedules*. Prior to the processing of canned product for distribution in commerce, an establishment shall have a process schedule (as defined in § 381.300(n) of this subpart) for each canned poultry product to be packed by the establishment.

(b) *Source of process schedules*. (1) Process schedules used by an establishment shall be developed or determined by a processing authority.

(2) Any change in product formulation, ingredients, or treatments that are not already incorporated in a process schedule and that may adversely affect either the product heat penetration profile or sterilization value requirements shall be evaluated by the establishment's processing authority. If it is determined that any such change adversely affects the adequacy of the process schedule, the processing authority shall amend the process schedule accordingly.

(3) Complete records concerning all aspects of the development or determination of a process schedule, including any associated incubation tests, shall be made available by the establishment to the Program employee upon request.

(c) *Submittal of process information*. (1) Prior to the processing of canned product for distribution in commerce, the establishment shall provide the inspector at the establishment with a list of the process schedules (including alternate schedules) along with any additional applicable information, such as

the retort come-up operating procedures and critical factors.

(2) Letters or other written communications from a processing authority recommending all process schedules shall be maintained on file by the establishment. Upon request by Program employees, the establishment shall make available such letters or written communications (or copies thereof). If critical factors are identified in the process schedule, the establishment shall provide the inspector with a copy of the procedures for measuring, controlling, and recording these factors, along with the frequency of such measurements, to ensure that the critical factors remain within the limits used to establish the process schedule. Once submitted, the process schedules and associated critical factors and the procedures for measuring (including the frequency), controlling, and recording of critical factors shall not be changed without the prior written submittal of the revised procedures (including supporting documentation) to the inspector at the establishment.

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§ 381.303 Critical factors and the application of the process schedule.

Critical factors specified in the process schedule shall be measured, controlled and recorded by the establishment to ensure that these factors remain within the limits used to establish the process schedule. Examples of factors that are often critical to process schedule adequacy may include:

- (a) *General*. (1) Maximum fill-in weight or drained weight;
- (2) Arrangement of pieces in the container;
- (3) Container orientation during thermal processing;
- (4) Product formulation;
- (5) Particle size;
- (6) Maximum thickness for flexible, and to some extent semirigid containers during thermal processing;
- (7) Maximum pH;
- (8) Percent salt;
- (9) Ingoing (or formulated) nitrite level (ppm);
- (10) Maximum water activity; and
- (11) Product consistency or viscosity.

(b) *Continuous rotary and batch agitating retorts*. (1) Minimum headspace; and

(2) Retort reel speed.

(c) *Hydrostatic retorts*. (1) Chain or conveyor speed.

(d) *Steam/air retorts*. (1) Steam/air ratio; and

(2) Heating medium flow rate.

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§ 381.304 Operations in the thermal processing area.

(a) *Posting of processes*. Process schedules (or operating process schedules) for daily production, including minimum initial temperatures and operating procedures for thermal processing equipment, shall be posted in a conspicuous place near the thermal processing equipment. Alternatively, such information shall be available to the thermal processing system operator and the inspector.

(b) *Process indicators and retort traffic control*. A system for product traffic control shall be established to prevent product from bypassing the thermal processing operation. Each basket, crate or similar vehicle containing unprocessed product, or at least one visible container in each vehicle, shall be plainly and conspicuously marked with a heat sensitive indicator that will visually indicate whether such unit has been thermally processed. Exposed heat sensitive indicators attached to container vehicles shall be removed before such vehicles are refilled with unprocessed product. Container loading systems for crateless retorts shall be designed to prevent unprocessed product from bypassing the thermal processing operation.

(c) *Initial temperature*. The initial temperature of the contents of the coldest container to be processed shall be determined and recorded by the establishment at the time the processing cycle begins to assure that the temperature of the contents of every container to be processed is not lower than the minimum initial temperature specified in the process schedule. Thermal processing systems which subject the filled and sealed containers to water at any time before process timing begins shall be operated to assure that such