

The Retail Food Safety Consortium: A New Resource for the Retail Food Safety Community

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In 2005, the Retail Food Safety Consortium (RFSC) was first founded with a collaboration among five land grant universities (University of Arkansas, Clemson University, Purdue University, Rutgers University, and Utah State University) and three science-based associations that involve retail food safety stakeholders (Association of Food and Drug Officials, National Environmental Health Association, and International Association of Food Protection). The RFSC, through networking, information sharing, and strategic planning of activities, enhances the ability of food safety professionals to work more effectively with the retail food industry. There are four main goals of the newly formed consortium: 1) Enhance collaboration between retail food safety professionals, 2) Identify and scientifically validate retail food safety practices, 3) Collect, develop, review, and disseminate retail food safety resources, and 4) Identify and prioritize retail food safety research needs.

In 2007, the collaborative group received a grant from USDA-CSREES to enhance and expand its activities related to retail food safety. As part of this effort, a new website was created and is available at: www.retailfoodsafety.org. The primary intent of the website is to provide information and training materials relative to food safety and safe food handling for retail food establishments and foodservice operations. The RFSC is dedicated to providing food safety information to regulator, educators, and food industry professionals who serve the retail food industry. At the annual Association of Food and Drug Officials meeting this past June, the new website was launched. To date, there are links to over 1000 different resources important to retail food safety stakeholders

Within the site, there is retail food safety information specific to national, state, and counties within states.

- National information (<http://www.retailfoodsafety.org/national/>) contains information about federal agencies, industry-associated groups and other organizations involved with retail food operations. Current content includes information from the Conference for Food Protection, United States Department of Agriculture, United States Food and Drug Administration, International Association for Food Protection, Institute of Food Technologists, Association of Food and Drug Officials, National Environmental Health Association, Food Marketing Institute, National Restaurant Association, and the President's Food Safety Working Group.
- State information (<http://www.retailfoodsafety.org/state/>) includes information about state agencies, state industry-associated groups and

- other organizations that are involved with retail food programs. Current content includes state associated information about retail/foodservice Food Code(s), food manager's certification requirements, and universities offering retail food safety programs. Issues important to the state Retail Grocers Association, Restaurant Association, Environmental Health Association, Health Department and Department of Agriculture.
- County information (<http://www.retailfoodsafety.org/county/>) for each state provides specific information for each county about jurisdictional food handling requirements and retail food safety training opportunities. Current content includes information from local Health Departments, Departments of Agriculture and Forestry Resources.

Another important component of the website is dedicated to providing training resources that can be used to better educate retail food safety professionals. This part of the website (<http://www.retailfoodsafety.org/resources/>) site provides retail food safety information for educators, trainers, and learners for a wide variety of topics in different educational formats, languages, and audiences. As you enter the website, you will have the opportunity to “search” for resources and also an opportunity to “submit” resources that you feel would help others.

The search function (<http://www.retailfoodsafety.org/resources/search/>) will allow you to perform specific search for resources located on the website. By limiting your search criteria, you will be able to locate resources on specific topics of interest. Adding in a keyword will allow you to search within the title, author, and description of a resource. You can also limit your search to a specific topic, audience type, origin, language, and/or location.

The submit function (<http://www.retailfoodsafety.org/resources/submit/>) allows you to provide additional links to the national website. As part of the submission process, a RFSC content committee will review all submitted information to ensure that it is appropriate for use on the RFSC website.

While the RFSC website is still in its infancy, I think you will find this new web-based resource a valuable tool for the retail food safety professional. If you get the chance, check out the site and submit retail food safety resources that you think would benefit others.