



NEWS RELEASE

Defense Commissary Agency

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Patrons urged to ‘Be Food Safe’

*By Millie Slamin,
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FORT LEE, Va. – In observance of National Food Safety Education Month, the Defense Commissary Agency wants its customers to increase their knowledge of proper food safety and food defense by providing tips and resources where they can find the most up-to-date information on food product safety. To do this, DeCA has teamed with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the nonprofit Partnership for Food Safety Education. Together with the U.S. Army Veterinary Command, U.S. Air Force Public Health and Public Health personnel, these agencies are offering informational brochures, photographs, reference materials and other resources about DeCA’s “Be Food Safe” Campaign at a your local commissary.

According to the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, food defense focuses on protecting the food supply from contamination with a variety of chemicals, biological agents or other harmful substances by people who want to do us harm. On the other hand, food safety addresses the accidental contamination of food products by biological, chemical or physical hazards during processing or storage.

“Our customers’ health and safety are first and foremost,” said DeCA Director and CEO Philip E. Sakowitz Jr., “so we take food safety and food defense to the highest levels.

“I am proud to say that we do this by employing stringent security measures that ensure food products sold in our commissaries meet or exceed safety regulations.”

DeCA’s watchdog is its public health and safety office, which enforces the Food and Drug Administration’s Food Code and oversees proper food handling for all 255 commissaries.

According to health and safety officials, food products are monitored by “multiple eyes” upon arrival at each store and every step of the way to shelves or display cases. Employees further ensure food products are protected from potential contamination by continually checking the packaging and rotating items according to manufacturer guidelines. Doing this ensures customers have the safest, freshest products possible.

Authorized commissary shopper Christopher Wicker, a public health adviser from DeCA’s health and safety office, said he is impressed with DeCA’s commissary employees, because they are genuinely concerned about properly handling products so they exceed customer food safety expectations.

Wicker said food safety and defense awareness are ongoing “24/7” at DeCA headquarters. There, public health employees are assigned around-the-clock to respond to product recalls. Once notified, they immediately contact stores to have products removed from their shelves.

DeCA’s concern for customer safety extends beyond commissary doors and into their homes as it reminds them to employ the basics of being food safe by cleaning, separating, cooking and chilling foods to help reduce the risk of illnesses and offers the following food safety and food defense tips:

- Wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before you prepare food or after playing outside, touching pets and using the bathroom. Sing “Happy Birthday” twice while washing hands to make sure you are washing long enough to send germs down the drain.
- Work on a clean surface. Prevent cross-contamination by always using a clean cutting board. Use one cutting board for fresh produce or bread and a separate one for meat, poultry and seafood.
- Rinse fruits and vegetables under running tap water, including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten. Dry with a paper towel.
- If lunches are made at home the night before, keep them in the refrigerator until it is time to go. Make sure the refrigerator temperature is 40 degrees Fahrenheit, or below, at all times. Use an appliance thermometer to check the temperature.
- Use an insulated lunch box, with an insulated bottle for hot foods or a frozen gel pack or a frozen juice box to keep perishable foods cold.
- Wash insulated lunch totes or boxes with hot soapy water after each use. Throw away any perishable food not eaten at lunchtime.

- Never leave perishable foods out at room temperature for more than two hours.

Visit <http://www.commissaries.com> and choose “Links” and “Health/Food Safety” from the dropdown box, which will bring you to a list of Web sites where you can view the latest health and safety reports and information from other agencies as well as the latest alerts and recalls.

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About DeCA: *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings worth about \$3,400 annually for a family of four. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America’s military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.*