

NSF Standards On Food Shields

The National Sanitation Foundation or NSF has been around for 64 years and began testing equipment in 1952. They have provided a valuable national guideline for the manufacture of food equipment. After a rigorous certification process and adhering to the manufacture standards set forth by NSF, a manufacturer may apply the NSF Mark to its product or equipment.

NSF is not a governing body, but provides programs and services to augment and support the work of regulatory officials around the country, including standards development, product testing and certification.

The 3,200 health departments around the country are the governing bodies that determine what is acceptable and what is not. They may or may not use NSF as their criteria defining what is safe for the constituents of their jurisdiction.

In March of 2008, NSF issued changes to Standard 2 relating to food shields. These changes were the end result of a 2 - year long project to better incorporate factual data relating to the protection of food in serving lines. The NSF Task Group on Food Shields included a wide range of professionals involved in the hospitality industry, from consultants and manufacturers to dealers, operators and health inspectors. The group looked at every aspect of food shields weighing all factors when deciding whether or not to change specific criterion.

The basic statement of NSF regarding food shields is that “A food shield shall provide a barrier between the mouth of the customer and unpackaged food to minimize the potential of contamination of the food by a customer” Now the only question remaining is to define what that “barrier” is.

NSF STANDARD 2 (Food Shields) clarified:

End Panels

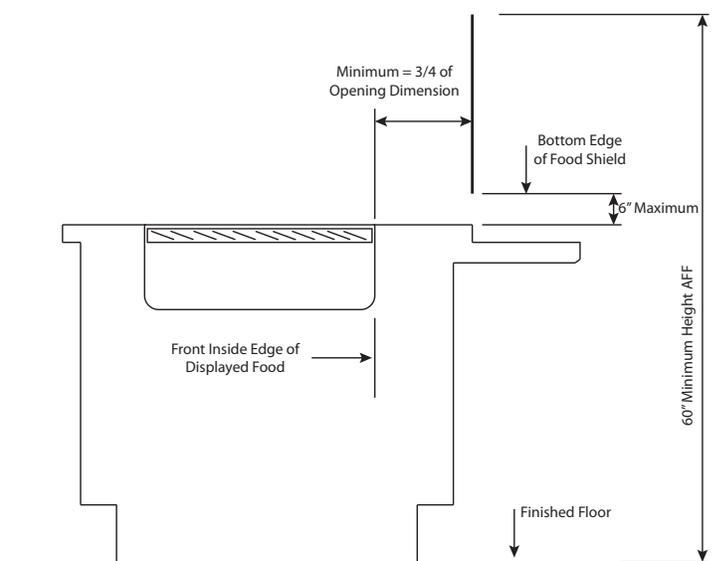
- All food shields shall have an end panel at each end of the food shield. The end panel shall be a minimum of 18 inches deep from the leading edge of the front glass panel. The minimum height of the end panel shall be equal to the overall height of the food shield. The gap from the bottom of the end panel to the counter shall not be greater than 1-1/2 inches. (There were no requirements for end panels previously).
Note: If a food shield is to be installed within 3 inches of a wall an end panel is not required.

Cooking / Demonstration / Carving Station Operations

- Any food shield used in front of a carving station shall have a vertical barrier with a minimum height of 60" above finished floor.
- The maximum opening below this vertical barrier is 6".
- The minimum distance between this vertical barrier and the food it is protecting is 3/4 the distance of the opening (if the opening is 6" then the distance must be 4 1/2" from glass to food).
- End panels are required at 12" depth.

In previous iterations of NSF guidelines for food shields there was no distinction between a self-serve food shields (patron gets their own food) or cafeteria service / full serve food shield. Now NSF dictates design differences between the two.

Figure 1 - Cooking/Carving Food Shield



Self-Serve Shields (Figure 2)

- On any self serve food shield, the opening between the glass and counter shall not be greater than 13" (this is a change from the previous maximum opening of 14").
- The sum of a food shield's protected horizontal plane (X) and it protected vertical plane (Y) shall be greater than or equal to 20 inches. Either X or Y may equal 0 inches. (this is a change from the previous minimum of 18").
- The maximum gap between sections of glass is 2". (this gap criteria was not called out previously).
- The minimum distance from the bottom leading edge of the food shield and the front inside edge of displayed food is represented as 3/4 of the distance of the opening. For example if the opening is at the maximum of 13" then the minimum distance from the food to the front edge of the glass is 9-3/4". (previously this was 7" minimum).

Full-Serve Shields / Cafeteria Style Protectors (Figure 3)

- On any full serve guard the sum of a food shield's protected horizontal plane (X) and it protected vertical plane (Y) shall be greater than or equal to 24 inches. For example if the guard is 12" high it must be 12" deep as well.
- The maximum gap between the front panel and the top shelf is 3/4".
- The maximum gap between the counter and the bottom of the front panel is 1-1/2".
- Again end panels are required for all shields that are not within 3" of a wall.

Multiple-Tier Food Shields / Display Cases

- The lower tier must conform to the standards of a self serve guard.
- All tiers above the bottom tier must have a permanently attached label restricting use to wrapped or prepackaged food.

Figure 2 - Self-Service Food Shield

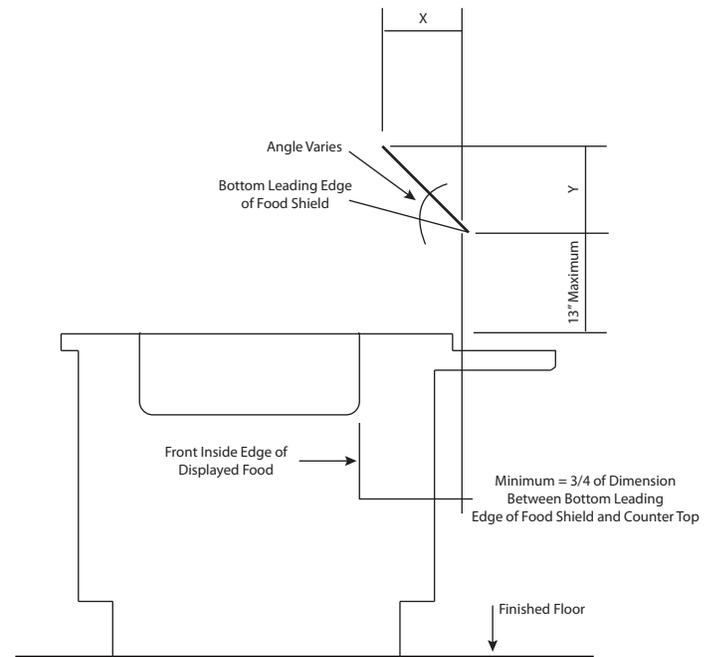


Figure 3 - Cafeteria Counter Food Shield

