

**B**ountiful, fresh-looking salad bars are marquee attractions in many foodservice operations. They are also major areas of concern for operators and safety-savvy guests, requiring sophisticated planning and tight operational systems. While food is the starring attraction, equipment to ensure product safety plays a critical supporting role.

Several basic equipment options exist, from simple portable bar models with insulated wells for icing foods to higher-end cold wall recessed rail (frost-top) and air-chilled models that automatically maintain temperatures at or below 41°F. A combination of ice and refrigeration is available, as well. Regardless of the model selected, however, the bar's ability to maintain the temperature designated as safe in the FDA's Food Code is paramount.

New technologies beyond the physical bar are making the job easier. Pan inserts play an active role in temperature maintenance. One example: LiquiTec® cold pans by Delfield, feature Eutectic fluid encased in a jacket that covers the entire bottom and side surface areas of the pan. The fluid is cooled by the refrigerant lines within the salad bar, thus cooling the entire pan. According to Delfield, the technology provides 10 times more surface coverage than a traditional mechanically cooled pan. The fluid remains liquid at extremely cold temperatures, providing consistent, even cooling.

For maintaining safe temperatures on dressings, mayonnaise and other toppings, Electrolux now offers a chiller for squeeze bottles. A self-contained, stainless-steel plug-in unit, the cooler holds six pre-chilled bottles at safe temperatures. It relies on thermo-electric refrigeration specifically designed for small-scale use. The technology results in a silent refrigeration unit with no moving parts. "It's operated with a simple on-off switch and is pre-set to proper temperature," says Electrolux's Scott Applebee.

## TOP-DOWN SAFETY

While refrigeration and insulated containers go a long way toward ensuring bottom-up safety, food shields (also known as sneeze guards) protect foods from the top down. The theory behind food shields is simple: They provide a physical barrier between food and the coughs and sneezes of guests using the salad bar.

Design-wise, Dave Murry of ADM SneezeGuards says the biggest trend has been toward a more minimalist look. "Fifteen years ago, when the big salad buffet concepts were all the rage, you saw a lot of massive, brass-and-glass sneeze structures," he says. "Today, people want less metal, more glass and a smaller profile."



**Refrigerated salad bar with LiquiTec cold pans.**

For functionality, the big news is flexibility. "Sneeze guards are no longer big, static pieces of equipment," Murry says. "Years ago, employees had to duck and struggle to work under the glass. Today, we have tilting sneeze guards that make access and cleaning easy."

With the right combination of training, supervision and safety-enhancing equipment, you can ensure your salad bar will draw customers as much for its appealing fresh products as it does for its clean, safe operation.

For information and advice on safe salad bar operations, including prep work, set-up procedures and temperature control, visit [http://www.restaurant.org/foodsafety/how\\_to\\_salad.cfm](http://www.restaurant.org/foodsafety/how_to_salad.cfm).

## 7 SUPPLIES FOR SAFE SALAD BARS

1. Single-use disposable wipes. They are safer for cleaning than reused cloths.
2. Hand-held, non-contact thermometers. Employees should check the temperature of salad bar items every two hours.
3. Color-coded service ware. Crocks, bowls, utensils should be changed out every couple of hours (or more, if necessary); color-coding helps staff manage product rotation and utensil placement.
4. Long-handled spoons, ladles and tongs. They're less likely to fall into salads and dressings, requiring guests to "go fishing."
5. Clear signage. Customers need to know what's what, or they'll dip in and sample to find out. Signage should also remind guests to use a clean plate on return visits.
6. Chilled plates. They reinforce a message of freshness and quality.
7. Vertical flatware storage. Handles up means guests won't touch the surface of another diner's silverware when grabbing their own.