

COMMUNITY REFRIGERATORS

A community refrigerator is a refrigerator located in a public space and is a mutual aid project which can enable food or beverages to be shared within a community. As this idea has gained in popularity nationally, municipalities in Connecticut have begun fielding questions from constituents related to town-sponsored community refrigerators.

The planning and operation of community refrigerators encompasses more than just leaving a refrigerator in a public space; when municipalities offer a service, they often have a duty of care to ensure that the program is safe. If your municipality is exploring the idea of community refrigerators, consider following the risk management recommendations below.

Recommendations

- Consider securing the refrigerator in a manner that minimizes the risk from damage due to external forces, including but not limited to weather-related incidents and human intervention.
- Determine and ensure that a proper GFCI is in place to power the refrigerator.
- Consideration should be given to determine a location for the refrigerator that allows it to be protected from weather-related and other natural elements.
- Consider securing the doors of the refrigerator to reduce the likelihood that an unsupervised child can open the door.
 - Consider using a refrigerator that makes it less likely for a child to hide inside.
- Consider developing a process for cataloguing, removing, and destroying items that were not placed in the community refrigerator by the municipality.
- Consider developing a plan for stocking and monitoring the contents of the refrigerator. This would include who is responsible for stocking the refrigerator and how regularly the refrigerator will be stocked.
- Consider stocking the refrigerator with only bottled water. This will assist in minimizing the risk of allergic reactions to non-water items.
- Consider developing, implementing, and maintaining a Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces plan in accordance with the guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).¹ If one is currently in use, revise the plan to include the refrigerator and the surrounding area around the refrigerator. Inclusive in this plan should be to ensure the safe and correct use² and storage of disinfectants, including storing products securely away from children – in accordance with OSHA 29 CFR 1910.1200.
- Consider following the CDC's Guidance for Park Administrators³, including:
 - The targeted use of disinfectants can be done effectively, efficiently, and safely on outdoor hard surfaces and objects frequently touched by multiple people (e.g. refrigerators).
- The municipality should consider how they will manage and monitor the area in and around the community refrigerator to limit excessive gathering to maintain safe social distancing to reduce the spread of COVID-19. This should be done in accordance with CDC guidelines and current Connecticut Executive Orders for park administrators with respect to gathering in public places.
- Post signage discouraging groups from gathering in larger numbers than are currently recommended or allowed in accordance with current Connecticut Executive Orders. It is a best practice to consult the municipality's legal counsel to review signage language prior to installation.

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¹ https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/pdf/REopening_America_Guidance.pdf

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/parks-rec/park-administrators.html>

- Consider posting signage indicating that the refrigerator is cleaned at the discretion of the municipality and reviewed for stocking purposes regularly, the municipality does not monitor the actions of those individuals utilizing the refrigerator. It is a best practice to consult the municipality's legal counsel to review signage language prior to installation.

For more information on this topic, please contact your CIRMA Risk Management Consultant. Please visit our training and education program page at CIRMA.org for our current training schedule.