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Do You Need a Hazmat Team to Clean Your Office Fridge?

Cleaning the refrigerator went horribly wrong for one employer. An enterprising employee decided to tackle the office's filthy fridge full of rotten food; but as she removed the food from the refrigerator and placed it in the conference room, it created a smell so noxious that it sent seven co-workers to the hospital and made many others ill.

After one employee called 911, firefighters evacuated the building and called in a hazmat team. "Yuck! 7 Hospitalized After Office Fridge Cleanup," *Associated Press* (May 13, 2009).

Crews found an unplugged refrigerator crammed with moldy food. The mixture of old lunches and disinfectant caused 28 people to need treatment for vomiting and nausea.

Authorities say the worker who cleaned the fridge didn't need treatment — allergies had kept her from smelling any odor.

Commentary

The problem in this case was not the enterprising employee who couldn't take the filth any longer, but the scores of employees who continued to deposit their food into a disgusting refrigerator and failed to remove old items.

Employers should have a policy in place that prohibits leaving food in an office refrigerator longer than two days. They should also advise employees that they will discard any items left longer than five days.

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