Reduced Oxygen Packaging without a Variance Requires HACCP

Reduced Oxygen Packaging (ROP), is done in many ways. The most common food establishment use of ROP is to mechanically remove air from around food in a plastic bag to create a tight seal, called vacuum packaging. Packaging food in re-sealable zipper storage bags is not considered ROP.

There are many benefits to using ROP, such as reducing freezer burn, portioning product, prolonging shelf life. Unfortunately, by removing the oxygen from around a food, you are also creating an environment favorable to the growth of Clostridium botulinum. This can make a safe food into a potentially lethal food after packaging. It is because of this that there are many requirements around ROP.

Any ROP packaged food done without a variance and HACCP plan must be:

- Held below 41°F and,
- Have a water activity of .91 or less, or
- Have a pH of 4.6 or less, or
- Be a cured meat from a USDA-regulated facility from an intact package, or

ROP = Reduced Oxygen Packaging

TCS = Time/Temperature Control for Safety Food = Potentially hazardous food

PUBLIC HEALTH REASONS:
When followed as written, the ROP methods in this section all provide controls for the growth and/or toxin production of C. botulinum and L. monocytogenes without a variance.

Food Safety Program