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## **Commercial Shelf Life Coding**

Most if not all commercial products produced for resale have a shelf life code imprinted on the package. Shelf life is manufacturer's guidance under normal storage practices, inventory control and rotation. Temperature variations or extremes and poor handling practices may affect useful shelf life of most food products. Manufacturers have different methods of showing shelf life. The following are the most common uses of shelf life with guidance on the amount of time a product can be extended.

1. Package has a stated "Sell by" Date. This date tells the store how long to display the product for sale. If the date is reached, the product should be pulled from sale if at a store, or held at distribution points pending review by designated food inspection personnel. They may upon inspection extend the shelf life for up to 30 additional days.

2. Package has a stated "Best if used by, (or Before)" or "Guarantee Fresh" dates. This date shows the date recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date. If no manufacture extension of shelf life guidance has been provided by NEXCOM and if the date is reached, the product should be referred to designated food inspection personnel. They may upon inspection extend the product for up to 30 days with additional reviews available. If NEXCOM provides guidance, that information will be used to compute the extended shelf life and to establish a "sell by date".

3. Package has a stated "Use By" date. The last date recommended for the use of a product while at peak quality. The manufacturer of the product has determined the date. If the date is reached, the product should be pulled from sale if at a store, or held at distribution points pending review by designated food inspection personnel. They may upon inspection extend the product for up to 30 days with additional reviews available.

4. Coded Dated Product. If the product only has a date on the package, it should be considered a "Sell By" date unless NEXCOM has provided additional shelf life guidance on the product. Inspectors will use the date on the package or the NEXCOM guidance; whichever is the later date, to determine the stated shelf life of the product. If the date is coded and inspectors cannot determine a date, contact Navy Exchange Service Command for information on how to read the product's code.

Point of Contact. The Navy Exchange Ships Store Program will be the custodian for all shelf life guidance provided by manufacturers. This information will be periodically published and distributed to users. Any questions or copies of guidance should be directed to Mr. Gene Hoffman, Ships Store Program (Code A), 3280 Virginia Beach, VA 23452. Phone: 757 502-7472 or [gene\\_hoffman@nexweb.org](mailto:gene_hoffman@nexweb.org)