Freezing food does not kill germs

By Nancy Shute, NPR

Think that freezing food kills E. coli and other nasty microbes? Think again.

That’s the lesson from the new E. coli caused by frozen chicken quesadillas and other snacks that has sickened 24 people in 15 states.

Freezing does slow down the microbes that cause food to spoil, but it’s pretty much useless for killing dangerous bugs.

“It actually does a pretty good job of preserving many of the pathogens and microbes that will cause problems later if thawed out,” says , an extension research specialist at the UC Davis, who studies food safety.

The strain of E. coli – shiga toxin-producing 0121 – involved in the current outbreak hasn’t been seen in frozen food before, but other pathogens have caused illness through frozen foods like pot pies, says , a professor of food science at Cornell University. He is working with of Buffalo, N.Y., producer of the foods involved in the outbreak, to figure out the source of the contamination.

A first issued last week was expanded Thursday to include all food produced at the company’s Waycross, Ga., plant. Its frozen snacks, cheesesteak sandwiches, and the like are sold nationwide.

Weidmann also wasn’t surprised to hear that frozen food could harbor E. coli. “We store a lot of microbes in the lab,” he says. “The easiest way is at minus 80 degrees.”

But while freezing doesn’t defeat pathogens, heat will.

Bacteria die if they're heated to 165F. Cooking instructions on frozen food packages are designed to deliver a temperature of 165F to the coldest part of the product, according to the Grocery Manufacturers Association.

The foods involved in this outbreak are all meant to be cooked, not just warmed up, before they're eaten. Snacky foods like mini pizza slices and cheese steaks implicated in the outbreak are often heated in microwaves, and microwave ovens are notorious for heating food unevenly. Thus the sometimes-intricate package instructions involving turning, stirring, and waiting.

The median age of the people who have fallen ill is 17. It's easy to imagine a scenario where a hungry teenager briefly nukes the pizza dippers and dives in. That's not to say that's what happened in this outbreak. "I don't mean by any stretch to imply that the consumer is at fault here," Wiedmann says.

But safe equals piping hot when it comes to frozen foods. Wiedmann says the most foolproof way to do that is to give up the convenience of the microwave and put foods that require cooking in the oven for a good hot bake.

"With a frozen ready-to-cook food, I would always go with the stove, not the microwave," he says.

Judge sides with backcountry skiers over snowmobilers

By John Miller and Todd Dvorka, AP

BOISE, Idaho – A federal judge in Idaho says the U.S. Forest

Service broke the law when it didn't craft rules to govern snowmobile travel, handing powder-loving backcountry skiers and snowshoe enthusiasts a victory that could extend to national forests nationwide.

U.S. District Magistrate Judge Ronald Bush ruled Friday that the Forest Service must go back to work on its 2005 Travel Management Rule and draw up regulations designating areas of use and non-use by all off-road vehicles, including snowmobiles, on national forest lands.

How this decision affects the Lake Tahoe Basin, Eldorado, Tahoe and Toiyabe forests is not known.

A decision in Idaho curtailing snowmobiling could affect national forests throughout the U.S. Photo/LTN file

The Idaho-based Winter Wildlands Alliance had argued the agency's decision to allow individual forests to exempt snowmobiles from the rules was illegal and has created conflicts between snowmobiles and backcountry skiers.

The judge agreed with the skiers' group, ordering the Forest Service to write a new rule consistent with his decision within 180 days. The decision will lead to changes in national forests in Idaho, but could also prompt national forests across the West and other states to revisit its off-road policies.

”The court finds the OSV (over-snow vehicles) exemption is contrary to law,” Bush wrote. ”The court finds that the 2005 Travel Management Rule is arbitrary and capricious to the extent that it does not require designations for the use of OSVs upon the national forest lands.”

Mark Menlove, executive director with the Winter Wildlands Alliance, said the decision was a monumental victory for backcountry skiers and other winter recreationists seeking a peaceful experience in the woods.

The group’s goal is to not shut down snowmobiles in national forests, but force the agency to designate specific boundaries that carve out distinct areas for those who want to explore on powered sleds and those preferring skis, snowshoes and hiking boots.

”Many of our members use snowmobiles more and more to get to certain places, so we’re not in any way asking the forest service to ban them,” Menlove told the Associated Press on Monday. ”But we are asking for some balance there, where our constituents can go and find peace and powder snow in the backcountry.”

The U.S. Attorney’s Office in Idaho, which represented the Forest Service in the case, said the review process has not yet started to determine if an appeal is appropriate. Government lawyers also declined to comment on the decision.

But the ruling was disappointing to Idaho’s snowmobiling community and the groups that joined the lawsuit to defend the existing rule. Sandra Mitchell, public lands director for the Idaho State Snowmobiling Association, said she was prepared to take part in the process of drafting a new rule and defending the recreational opportunities and the rural economies that benefit from the snowmobiling industry each winter.

”Obviously we want to ride in a responsible way, and be in places where we don’t have negative impacts,” Mitchell said. ”But we also want to ensure that opportunities exist not just now but for future generations. Snowmobiling brings thousands of people to Idaho to recreate, and that’s a huge driver for economies in the winter for rural Idaho.”

Tahoe a hot ticket for second homeowners

By Lauren Schuker Blum, Atthew Dolan and Candace Jackson, Wall Street Journal

The hottest new tech-industry accessory? A house in Tahoe.

Venture capitalist Steven Stull recently paid $11.875 million for a 10,000-square-foot waterfront estate on Lake Tahoe in Incline Village. David Duffield, co-founder of Workday, paid $25.5 million for another Incline Village estate, according to public records. It was the largest sale on the Sierra Nevada lake since 2008, says listing broker Kerry Donovan.

Brokers in towns surrounding Tahoe, say sales have picked up dramatically in the last six months, as spillover from the Bay Area’s exuberant housing market has finally reached the area. The Nevada side of the lake has gotten an additional boost since California passed Proposition 30, hiking income taxes on the wealthy and increasing the appeal of owning on the zero-income-tax Nevada side.

Tahoe’s second home market is resurrected. Photo/LTN file

Brokers say sales are surging on both sides of the lake. “December was the strongest December we’ve ever seen in the business,” says Susan Lowe, the corporate broker for Chase International, pointing to data that stretch back to 1990. According to the agency, the first quarter of 2013 saw $246.4 million home and condo sales in the area, up more than 70 percent from the first quarter of 2012.

Jim Telling, a partner at East West Partners, which developed the Village at Northstar, says the company has seen a 72 percent increase in the number of home sales since 2011. Average prices rose to $869,000 from $531,000, spurred by a large number of $1 million-plus sales.

Kate Wormington, a 17-year Apple veteran who left in 2010 to raise money for an education nonprofit, and her husband, Dan, a current Apple employee, recently snapped up a fully furnished, four-bedroom home that was listed for $2.1 million. The ski-in/ski-out property is at Constellation Residences at Northstar.

Wormington, a mother of two, says she liked the area’s friendly vibe as well as its amenities, such as ski valets and a chef-run s’mores bar.

“It is amazing to me how many people you run into,” she says, adding that they frequently see friends from the tech world and their hometown of San Carlos on weekends. “It feels like home.”

The change in the area’s fortunes has been swift and dramatic. Though the housing market in the Bay Area has been one of the strongest in the country, Lake Tahoe long struggled to recover from the downturn, with homes frequently sitting on the market for many months and selling well below asking price.

Despite the recent boom, prices still have yet to recover to their pre-downturn heights. Lowe says pricing generally dropped about 35 percent from the peak and is coming back slowly.

Martis Camp, a golf and ski community in Truckee that began construction in 2006, has sold 52 lots and homes since the start of January, says Brian Hull, director of sales, up from 27 at this point last year. Prices for lots range from the mid-$600,000s to $2 million and 108 homes have been completed so far.

Hull says the influx of younger families from the tech industry has resulted in a number of contemporary-style mountain homes with glass-filled architecture.

“Silicon Valley is at the cutting edge of changing the way we live with tech,” he says. “They’re really doing that with interesting homes from a design standpoint.”

Donovan, a broker with Chase International in Incline Village, the Nevada town where Oracle billionaire Larry Ellison has assembled a 7.6-acre lakefront compound, says Proposition 30 has had a positive impact on sales on the Nevada side. Though several high-profile sales have gone to tech-industry people, she says, the typical buyer is a wealthy baby boomer in finance or other industry from Northern or Southern California looking to relocate.

“People are thinking, ‘OK, I’d better just do it now,'” she says.

But Tahoe is not the only spot on the map seeing resurgence in high-end property transactions.

After a series of sluggish years, Miami’s luxury condo market is reviving, thanks in part to help from an unexpected source: New Yorkers.

Although buyers from Latin America and Europe have been lauded for helping to revive the city’s property prices, developers and real-estate agents now say it’s a new crop of Americans, mostly second-home buyers from New York, that has pushed luxury prices in Miami to a new level—and stirred a buying frenzy.

“A lot of them are buying now because Miami has really changed over the last couple of years, with a ton of New York restaurants and hotels opening up, with new development, and that has really made New Yorkers more comfortable with purchasing,” says Vanessa Grout, chief executive of Douglas Elliman’s Florida brokerage.

She estimates that about 60 percent of her firm’s luxury buyers are from New York, about double the percentage of a year ago.

Edgardo Defortuna, president and founder of Fortune International, a Miami development firm, says New Yorkers now make up about 25 percent of all luxury buyers, compared with around 10 percent a year ago.

The Hamptons of the Midwest is what Chicago is being called.

Straight across Lake Michigan from the Chicago Loop is a ribbon of tucked-away beach towns. On the Michigan side, this region is called Harbor Country. Elsewhere, it’s known as the “Hamptons of the Midwest.”

Now, after a slowdown, Chicago’s luxury buyers are returning to Second City’s longtime second home. Roughly 80 percent of its vacation properties are owned by residents of the Chicago area, according to real-estate agents, including such high-power figures as the Daley family, Mayor Rahm Emanuel and former Obama adviser David Axelrod.

“There aren’t six degrees of separation here,” says Kim Pruitt with the Harbor Country Chamber of Commerce. “It’s usually less than two, because it seems like everyone came from Chicago.”

While the real-estate slump hit both sides of the lake hard — some estimate that lakefront prices fell 25 percent to 35 percent during the worst of the recession—luxury buyers began returning to Harbor Country last year. Now brokers say high-end inventory is running low. Last year, 25 beachfront properties sold, five times the amount in an average year, brokers say.

In January and February, seven properties priced above $1 million sold or went into contract, says Dan Coffey, a broker with RE/MAX Harbor Country in Union Pier. One sale — a 6,000-square-foot, six-bedroom, six-full-bathroom, shingle-style beach house on 2 acres, with 200 feet of lakefront—topped $4 million, a level not seen since 2005.

Original craft brewery back in business

By Devin Leonard, Bloomberg Businessweek

There wasn’t much in the beer aisle back in the 1970s when Jack McAuliffe went to the local supermarket, just the usual

Budweiser, Miller, Coors, Falstaff and maybe some Pabst Blue Ribbon. The limited selection didn’t seem to bother the typical American drinker. But it wasn’t enough to suit McAuliffe.

A former naval submarine electrical technician, McAuliffe had fallen in love with full-bodied ales and stouts while serving in Scotland. He started brewing his own when he returned to San Francisco. His friends thought they were pretty good. McAuliffe didn’t disagree.

“I said to myself, ‘Man, what I need to do is build a brewery and start selling this stuff. I can get rich doing this,'” he recalls. In 1976, McAuliffe opened the New Albion Brewing Co. in Sonoma, one of the earliest American craft breweries.

It’s difficult to overstate what a radical notion this was at the time. Today there are 2,360 craft breweries, many of them started by entrepreneurial home brewers like McAuliffe. The Brewers Association, the craft beer industry’s trade group, boasts that its members sold $10 billion worth of beer in 2012. An entire ancillary industry has arisen to provide them with everything from organic hops to fermentation tanks to specially tailored financial consultation.

None of this existed, of course, when McAuliffe started New Albion. He remembers talking to brewery suppliers who struggled to suppress their mirth when he told them of his plans for his tiny operation: “They said, ‘You’re going to do what?'” These, after all, were people accustomed to doing business with corporations like Anheuser-Busch. McAuliffe ended up welding together his artisanal brewery out of used dairy equipment and Pepsi-Cola syrup drums.

McAuliffe made what is considered to be the first modern American pale ale. “I invented that,” he boasts. He also produced a porter, a stout and a draft ale.

He sold them all quickly. But McAuliffe was a better brewer than a businessman. He started out too small. Then he spent all of the brewery’s cash on an expansion plan only to discover that no investor would finance something as fanciful as a microbrewery. In 1982, New Albion filed for bankruptcy, and McAuliffe turned his back on the beer business.

“It wasn’t the best experience of my life,” he says. He left California and spent the next three decades designing industrial control systems for sewage treatment facilities and factories that produced aluminum car wheels.

Still, McAuliffe inspired other amateurs with high opinions of their home brews to turn professional. The result was a revolution in American brewing. The author Maureen Ogle calls New Albion “the most important failed brewery in the industry’s history” in her book “Ambitious Brew: The Story of American Beer.” “McAuliffe provided penniless entrepreneurs and ambitious home brewers with a model of how to build a small, functional, affordable brewhouse.”

Other aspiring craft brewers simply learned from McAuliffe’s mistakes. One of them was Jim Koch, founder of Boston Beer, who calls New Albion’s demise “a cautionary tale.”

He realized he needed to brew a lot more beer if his company was to survive and prosper. Early on, Koch also contracted with a Pittsburgh beer maker to make Sam Adams American Lager, his flagship product, rather than building his own brewery right away. Boston Beer became the country’s largest craft brewer with 54 different styles of beers.

“I made mistakes,” Koch says, “but I didn’t make the same ones Jack made.”

Three years ago, Koch got a call from one of his sales representatives. She had run into an odd character who claimed to have been the first microbrewer in America. The sales rep thought he was a little daft. The guy’s name was Jack McAuliffe.

“Holy s-,” Koch said. “He’s not a crazy guy. He was the original.”

Koch got in touch with McAuliffe and told him he had purchased the trademark to New Albion some years before. He wanted to know if McAuliffe was interested in reviving New Albion Ale with the help of Boston Beer.

“The idea was we would give him all the profits,” Koch says. “Hopefully, that would make the rest of his life a little better because a lot of us have done very well following in his footsteps.”

It wouldn’t be difficult either. The UC Davis fermentation science program had preserved some of the yeast originally used in the ale in a cold storage facility. All Koch and McAuliffe had to do was resuscitate the yeast, add ingredients like hops and malt, and New Albion Ale would be reborn. Surely there would be demand for one of the original craft beers now that offbeat brews were trendy.

Yet McAuliffe wasn’t interested. It bugged him that other craft brewers had come along after his flameout and become millionaires.

“He was angry for a lot of years,” says John Holl, a beer blogger and author of the forthcoming “The American Craft Beer Cookbook: 150 Recipes From Your Favorite Brewpubs and Breweries,” who befriended McAuliffe. “He really held a grudge against the industry.”

But Koch kept nudging, and McAuliffe eventually relented. He appreciated that some of the industry’s biggest names like

Koch and Sierra Nevada Brewing’s Ken Grossman were finally giving him credit for his contribution to the craft beer movement. He also needed the money.

In July, McAuliffe traveled to Boston to produce the first batch of New Albion Ale in 30 years. Typically a fan of his own recipes, he was satisfied with the results. “I thought it would sell pretty good,” he says.

Once again, McAuliffe was prescient. In January, Boston Beer shipped about 6,000 barrels of New Albion Ale, more than its namesake brewery had made in its entire existence. No sales figures are available yet. But McAuliffe has made $200,000 so far. Once Boston Beer has sold its entire shipments, it will be up to McAuliffe to carry on. Koch turned the New Albion trademark back over to McAuliffe, who can do whatever he wants with it as long as he doesn’t sell it to a large brewer like AB InBev. McAuliffe is grateful. But he has no plans to go back into beer making.

“I’m transferring all of that to my daughter Renee who lives in Cleveland,” he says. “She’s got the ball.”

At 68, he says, he has better things to do than go on publicity tours and be fawned over by beer geeks at conventions.

“The PR stuff was never my favorite part of running a brewery,” he scoffs. “I belong in the back with a red rag and a three-quarter-inch wrench in my back pocket, fixing machinery.”

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

• The Tahoe Fund received a $28,351 check from Vail Resorts courtesy of donations from guests at Northstar, Heavenly and Kirkwood who added a dollar donation while purchasing online lift tickets, season passes, lodging and rounds of golf.

• The South Shore Area Plan staff report for the April 9 Douglas County Planning Commission is online.

• The Weathered Page is a new book publishing company based in Reno that recently launched a website devoted to collecting user submitted stories and photographs by everyday outdoor enthusiasts doing the things they love in the places they live.

• The driving range at the Incline Village Championship Course is open. The golf season is anticipated to begin May 15.

• April is National Food Month. What are you eating?

Virginia City to heat up with chili cook off

Virginia City 30th annual Chili on the Comstock returns May 11-12.

Taking place along C St., the historic town’s main drive, the event includes a new Fireball Crawl.

The two-day event from 10am-5pm includes about 40 of the best chili cookers in the West competing for a spot in the International Chili Society World Finals later this year in Las Vegas. Competitors start from scratch on Saturday morning and a winner is picked for each day. There is also a people’s choice award with winners receiving cash and “Virginia City-style” prizes.

Tickets are on sale with tasting kits starting at $7 and the inaugural Fireball Crawl at $10 complete with a free shot of Fireball Whiskey to kick off the festivities. Purchase tickets here.

A Family Fun Zone takes over the Delta Saloon parking lot with multiple bounce houses, face painting, music including the Chris Gardner Band and more.

For more information, call (775) 847.7500.

S. Tahoe revamps city lease agreement policy

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe this week revised its policy for how contracts are awarded, and then later revised the lease with the restaurateur at Lake Tahoe Airport.

The overall contract issue keeps rearing its head. There are multiple multi-decade agreements in place or ones done decades ago that have not been enforced. The parking agreement with Heavenly Mountain Resort would be an example of the latter.

Then there’s the 30-year lease with Mountain West Aviation to operate the airport. It in large part favors the lessee and not the city.

The owners of Flight Deck restaurant have a year to pay off their debt to South Lake Tahoe. Photo/LTN file

The council asked for a more stringent policy when last year it came to light the electeds had not been notified of the multi-year agreement a now fired employee entered into with a nonprofit for it to lease a city-owned building.

While the city owns more than 200 parcels, this includes things like retention basins. Council asked staff in the future to provide a list of amenities people might actually want to rent or lease.

A request for proposal must be used when the amount is $30,000 or greater or the length of the contract is more than six months.

“We want to make sure the lessee can run a business and that the benefits to the public are maximized,” Deputy City Attorney Nira Feeley told the council April 2.

While rent is supposed to be charged at fair market, that isn’t happening at the airport.

The council agreed to alter the agreement with Tom and Diane Miller who own and operate the Flight Deck restaurant. The base rent is now $700. It had been $600 when the contract was signed in April 2010. It increased based on inflation so they were most recently supposed to be paying $631.

In addition to that $631, the Millers were supposed to be paying 5 percent of gross revenues less than $15,000 per month or 7 percent of gross revenues above $30,000. This included alcohol sales.

Instead, they chose not to pay anything. They were $40,000 in arrears as of March 1.

With the Alcoholic Beverage Control looking into how the city collects rent at the ice arena in terms of alcohol being part of gross sales, the city is amending most of its agreements.

The Millers took issue with the alcohol sales being part of gross revenues even though it's in the original the contract. (This is per staff. The Millers did not attend the meeting.)

It was agreed the Millers back rent would be reduced to $22,500. They have one year to pay it – interest free. If the restaurant, which is on the market, sells, then the debt would be tied to the sale.

Rent is now a flat $700 month with the city not collecting any percentage of any sales.

Councilwoman Brooke Laine brought up how this site has a history of losing money, and how former Councilman Mike Weber "walked away from considerable debt" when he owned Chase's restaurant at the airport.

Mayor Tom Davis tried to defend his former colleague, saying that wasn't true. But the airport manager said Laine's memory was more accurate.

(Weber didn't pay the debt until the next owner came along to give him some cash. City Clerk Suzie Alessi later wrote *Lake Tahoe News* to say, "Mike Weber's profit from the sale of the restaurant was reduced to pay off the debt he owed the city.")

Laine reluctantly voted for the revised agreement with the Millers.

“I want it to work, but I’m concerned,” Laine said.

Nevada Moves Day designed to get kids moving

Many Nevada schoolchildren will take part in organized events to walk or bicycle to school on April 24, which has been proclaimed the fourth annual Nevada Moves Day by Gov. Brian Sandoval.

Walking and bicycling to school events are planned for Douglas, Washoe, Clark, Lyon, Lincoln, Elko and other counties, with more than 110 schools across the state committing to participate in Nevada Moves Day.

Children not taking part in an organized school event are encouraged to involve their family in safely walking or bicycling to school on April 24 and other days.

To learn about specific Nevada Moves Day events, call (775) 888.7357 or email trowe@dot.state.nv.us.

Ski report: Resorts starting to close

These are the last three days of the season to ski at Diamond Peak and Homewood Mountain Resort.

Here is the April 5 ski report.

— Curtis Fong

LTUSD kindergarten registration to begin

Kindergarten registration for Lake Tahoe Unified School District is from April 29-May 10.

Children must be 5 on or before Oct. 1, 2013.

Transitional kindergarten is available for those who will turn 5 between Oct. 1-Dec. 2.

California Law requires:

1. You bring child’s birth certificate;

2. You bring proof of immunizations, which includes the Varicella (Chicken Pox), Hepatitis B and for most children – the last booster shot.

3. Your child has a health examination upon entry to school [schedule with your family doctor or El Dorado County Health Department at (530) 573.3155];

4. Your child has an oral health examination upon entry to school (dental examinations that have occurred in the last 12 months meet this requirement);

5. You bring proof of California residency.

Call your neighborhood for an appointment to preregister:

Bijou Community School (530) 543.2337

Sierra House Elementary (530) 543.2327

Tahoe Valley Elementary (530) 543.2350.