

# Alexandria Food Safety Advisory Council

## Minutes for 6/10/2009 Meeting

### 1) Gathering on June 10 (2:15 pm)

### 2) Introduction of Participants (2:25 pm)

- Bob Custard, EH Division Manager
- Kristin Garcia, EH Division Supervisor
- June Oden, ACPS
- Avi Rathnakumar, Jackson 20
- Susan Grandgeorge, Joe Theismanns
- Declan Conroy, Food Talk
- Vicki Griffith, Clydes
- Lisa Guli, AHD Epidemiologist
- Absent
  - Ann Hyde, Generous Georges
  - Cecille Escobar, EH Division
  - Seyra Hammond, EH Division
  - Adam Riecker, Assoc. of State & Territorial Health Officials
  - Jennifer Lehman, Restaurant Assoc. of Metropolitan Washington
  - Cathal Armstrong, Restaurant Eve
  - Charlene Douglas, George Mason U
  - Christy Przystawik, Food Matters
  - Cindy Staats, S.T.O.P.
  - Darryl Edwards, Alex. Consumer Affairs
  - Nora Partlow, St. Elmo's Café
  - Lynn Bennett, The Fountains
  - Regina Poteat, Starbucks
  - Serdar Basegmez, Red Poppy Catering
  - Terry McGowan, Shoppers Food Warehouse
  - Shazell Robinson, Va. Cooperative Extension

### 3) Final Report on April Initiative (2:30 pm)

*Bob Custard reintroduces Kristin Garcia, who gives a brief verbal presentation on EH's April Initiative.*

EH met with approximately 600 establishments during the initiative and anticipates 70 more establishments will be visited when Cecille Escobar returns to the field. The objectives of the initiative were to: introduce the EHS to their new territory, review Employee Health Policy requirements, provide Smoke Free Alexandria stickers, verify risk assessment, distribute FoodTalk and Bon Appétit, complete a language preferences survey, and verify emergency contact information. Observed strengths of the initiative: 1) the introduction of the new EHS without the stress and pressure of a traditional inspection, and 2) the discussion of the Employee Health Policy. Observed areas of weakness: 1) EHS were requested to present too much information at once, and 2) EH received incomplete emergency contact sheets.

The EH office will be conducting follow-ups on the April initiative during upcoming inspections, specifically addressing the Employee Health Policy (EHP). EHSs will be asking questions concerning the EHP and verifying that the policy is understood by the food handlers. EH would like to see a much higher compliance rate by CFMs with this requirement.

Contributions/Comment from the Room:

- Those restaurants that did not provide the complete emergency contact information can call to give any additional information.
- Restaurants felt it was helpful to meet the new EHS without the pressure of an inspection; the low stress meeting was very informative. They'd like to see more of these non-pressure meetings.

#### **4) New Facility Welcome Package – Discussion: What should it contain? (2:34 pm)**

*Bob Custard began the discussion of a New Facility Welcome Package by stating that such a project was something that EH had wanted to do for a long time, but was unable to do. Due to a new potential funding source (food safety funding from fees), it may be possible to create this new guide, and the EH office was looking for ideas on what to include, what not to include, what might be too much, what would be most helpful, etc. Currently, the EH Office does not have a Welcome Package to distribute.*

The project's goal would be to provide new restaurants with the basic information to get started, provide them with the most important things to know, and educate them on where to find the information independently. The object of this package is to provide the restaurant with something that is not too big (so that they aren't overwhelmed), but provide enough helpful information to be useful in creating good habits (the idea being that the first months of operation are the best time to develop good food safety habits. Bad habits, once formed, are hard to break.)

#### **Suggestion 1: A New Pocket Guide**

<<Bob distributed the 2005 FDA Food Code Pocket Guide as an example>>

- The pocket guide was developed by EH as a reference for City restaurants when Alexandria adopted the 2005 FDA Food Code. While the actual code is a couple of hundred pages and daunting to restaurant managers, this guide is small, concise, and useful. The recipients of the 2005 FDA Food Code were happy to receive this information, and it was generally agreed that restaurants would want such a guide in the future.
- Bob added that the EH Office was looking to revise the guide to fix some minor typos and to include the changes made by the 2009 FDA Food Code.

*Inquiry to Restaurants: Would they want a CD either instead of or in addition to a paper guide?*

- The general consensus was that while a CD could be useful, not all of the restaurants would use the CD; it could be placed in a draw never to be seen again. As an alternative, the paper guide could provide a link to the EH website or FDA website.

#### **Suggestion 2: Posters, Reminders, and Required Notifications**

- The New Facility Welcome Package should include hand washing posters; 3 compartment sink stickers, and a Quick Reference Guides for employees and managers (exs. how to calibrating thermometer and temperature at-a-glance references).
- After some detailed discussions, it was generally agreed that EH could provide templates for temperature logs with reference temperatures, but that EH should not provide a reusable temperature log.

### **Suggestion 3: Include a Thermometer with calibration instructions.**

- EH had provided thermometers to restaurants during outreach events in prior years.

*Discussion Point: What would most benefit Line employees?*

### **Suggestion 4: Pre-Opening Materials**

- It was suggested that the packet include a pre-opening checklist or materials.
- It was also suggested that the packet should include a list of the top five issues that restaurants have historically been marked as a deficiency during pre-opening inspections. This will ensure that issues like inadequate lighting, missing caulking, rough surfaces, or other items could be addressed before the inspection.

### **Suggestion 5: Include General Best Practices for Restaurant Operation**

#### **Suggestion 6: Employee Health Policy Info**

- It was also mentioned that having more health employee policy detail in the pocket guide would be helpful. It was noted that some restaurant workers use vomiting as an excuse not to report to work when they are intoxicated.

*Inquiry to EH: Would it be possible to have a 'practice inspection' within the first week?*

- Restaurants: Restaurants, as a whole, want to comply with the code, but can be unaware of some of the code requirements. The restaurants would want advice without being penalized for their ignorance.
- Bob: Training inspections might be able to address those concerns, and I like the idea of that type of inspection immediately after opening. What would be a good time frame to do this type of inspection?
- Restaurants: After your first 7 days, you really understand whether or not you set up your place well, but it is usually good to run through an entire week (including a weekend) to fully test your capabilities to operate.
- Bob: So the 2<sup>nd</sup> week is the most appropriate time for one of these training inspections? The first week being too chaotic?
- Restaurants: Exactly!

#### **Suggestion 7: Hot Sheet of Important Numbers, especially for emergencies**

- The hot sheet should include information or blanks for repair people, health department emergency pager, fire department, etc.

#### **Suggestion 8: To-Go Stickers**

#### **Suggestion 9: All the materials should be available in multiple languages, especially Spanish.**

- Since the EH office does not already have a resident Spanish translator, EH requested references.
- Mr. Conroy recommended his company's translator, stating that he was very good and affordable. Ms. Griffith also had a recommendation.

### **5) Emergency Guide for Food Service Establishments – Discussions: What should it contain? (4:00)**

Consensus was reached that EH should include guidance for when: the water system goes down; the water system gets contaminated, electrical power outage (for different durations); sewer system goes down; the sewer system back ups; gas outages, and when flooding occurs. All agreed the Action Plan emailed to the council last week was useful, but the restaurants believed the plan was too large (at 51 pages); it was feared that the book would be filed away never to be seen again (even in the emergency situations).

**Suggestion 1: Add 3-4 pages of common emergency tasks as major bullets in the pocket guide.**

*Discussion Point: To better target what information and resources are needed, who does the council believe is better prepared for emergencies: Chain Stores or Mom & Pop stores? Why is that group better prepared?*

- Chain stores have more detailed SOPs to address situations, and many times have a QA or regional office to help the manager resolve major problems.
- Mom and Pop's many times do not have a resource structure to fall back on like the chains, and handle emergency situations in a seat-of-the-pants style.
- Larger chains typically have greater turn over of employees and therefore have a greater possibility of have personnel not being completely trained. Even if an employee may know where the SOP is, he or she may be unfamiliar on how to execute it.
- Mom and Pop's typically have a less transient workforce and might have more historical knowledge on how to handle emergency situations.

*Discussion Point: What do existing restaurants do to address emergencies now?*

- Ms. Griffith volunteered what each of their restaurants use—each has an emergency binder (containing simple to follow flowcharts to address what each employee should do in foreseeable emergencies like fires) and an emergency supply kit (containing items like flashlights, cell phone, batteries, etc). She does say that any binder, guide, or kit is not useful without training awareness; learning how to deal with an emergency while the emergency is occurring is not helpful.
- Ms. Oden volunteered that the schools all have emergency actions plans in the event of emergencies. However, she was unsure if there was a special action plan to address the cafeterias specifically—she would have to check with the risk management office. She was aware that the schools have many redundant systems and/or back-up generators, and that in the past, most of the major problems have been avoided because of these items.
- Ms. Grandgeorge volunteered that her people have been trained to handle common problems like power outages, sewage back-ups, AC out, etc., and that the procedures (typically shutting down) were many times logical and straight forward. In the event of larger catastrophes, her line managers would contact her directly to help resolve the problem.

*Discussion Point: It can be assumed that individual restaurants can handle their individual problems (CFM training provides basic training on this); Are restaurants prepared for a larger community issue or a long-term problem (ex. Flu pandemic, natural disasters, etc)?*

- In situations as major as that, food is the least of the problems. Even in Isabella, grocery stores were still open and were selling food.
- Previous situations when emergencies hit Alexandria were discussed:

- Mr. Custard commented on some of the lessons learned by Hurricane Isabel, including the knowledge that most of the restaurants that incurred large losses did so because they failed to move their product when they were advised to move it.
- Ms. Griffith commented on her restaurant's experiences on September 11<sup>th</sup>. She described the flow charts her organization obtained from a conference, and explained that they provided a number templates for contact sheets and addressing water outages, sewage, fire, etc. that were helpful.
- Mr. Rathnakumar emphasized how important it was to have systems in place to account for emergencies and to train employees of that system. He used his company's efforts as an example, explaining that the management regularly surveys its employees and follows up with line people to assure the information is distributed. All line level employees have a single organized escape route from the hotel or restaurant or both. From a liability standpoint, doing the right thing and protecting ourselves and property is very important.
- Proximity to major landmarks or evacuation routes also plays a role in what a restaurant must prepare for. Ms. Griffith gave an example of one of her restaurants that is in close proximity to the White House; the Secret Service requires them to have faster evacuation plans than their other restaurants.

*Discussion Point: What tools would be useful to restaurants in emergencies?*

- Flow chart idea that Mr. Griffith had mentioned was requested.
- Protocols of what to do with an irate customer, turn off the fire alarm if the fire door is triggered, etc. was suggested.
- A Bon Appétit article could introduce these ideas, request information about what to do, and then link to our guide on the website.

*Discussion Point: Should restaurants have supplies reserved specifically for staff?*

- Many restaurants already have a "crash kit" or a list of emergency supplies on hand (like cell phone plan, flashlight, etc).
- A common list of items may be helpful.

*Discussion Point: Food Availability in Emergencies?*

- Not all places have the ability to close; some kitchens have captive audiences like hospitals, jails, nursing homes, etc.
- In previous emergencies, grocery stores were available for food supplies. Access to refrigerated trucks while the power is being restored may be required in future emergencies.

*Discussion Point: EH's Priorities in a Foreseeable Emergency*

- From the Health Department stance, if we have another Isabel, we are first going to focus on captive audiences (nursing homes, hospitals, etc). Then our 2<sup>nd</sup> tier is to get the large groceries stores open. Then we start working through the restaurant community. In the past, we didn't require each restaurant to have an inspection prior to opening after a citywide emergency; we expected the CFM to make that decision. We want to put guidance out there so people are more inclined to know what to do, but we don't think it is feasible to certify all of them.

- Restaurants: During Isabel, we were not getting the important information because the communication systems were failing (phone lines, faxes, etc.). The plans must be outlined before an emergency occurs.

*Discussion Point: EH's Priorities in an Unforeseeable Emergency*

- During Isabel, we had days to release information and prepare for emergencies. What should restaurants consider if there was a broad incident without warning? Also, what about a bio terrorism event or pandemic flu that is not per se a natural disaster?
- DC is trying to develop a new drill for those types of circumstances, but they were unsure if they wanted to disclose the plan so that the 'bad people' would know how we would respond.

*Inquiry to EH: Has EH discussed getting a twitter account to disseminate information?*

## **6) Disease Surveillance in Alexandria (3:45 pm)**

*AHD Epidemiologist Lisa Guli gave a presentation on Alexandria's surveillance techniques for certain diseases or bio-terrorism that can affect the Alexandria restaurant community*

Alexandria's Communicable Disease Unit, like those in neighboring jurisdictions, uses a number of metrics to anticipate trends in illness and future outbreaks. For example, Alexandria tabulates daily the aggregate number of hospital or urgent care visits by the local community. This data also contains the totals of flagged incidents where patients have mentioned experiencing a pre-defined symptom set. This data is collected without tracking sensitive or personal information, and is combined with other local jurisdictions to get a regional picture of what is happening.

The Communicable Disease Unit also investigates all confirmed foodborne illnesses, but is limited as to what assistance / warnings they can provide the community regarding incidences of certain types of diseases. For example: The unit does strongly advise high risk persons who could possibly transmit foodborne illness not go to work, but the epidemiologists do not have the authority to stop such people from working (confidentiality laws restrict the Health Dept. from informing the work place).

## **7) Upcoming Council Tasks**

- Eco-Friendly Restaurant Initiative will be discussed in further detail
- Demonstration of knowledge questions will be distributed again through the current email list
- An example emergency flow chart (with no copyright restriction) will be distributed through the email list.

**8) Next Meeting will be held on July 22<sup>nd</sup>.**

**9) Adjournment at 3:47 PM**