Bon Appétit
The Quarterly Food Safety Newsletter of the Alexandria Health Department

FALL 2011

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Alexandria Health Department
Environmental Health Division
4480 King Street, Suite 360
Alexandria, VA 22302
(703) 746-4910 (Office)
(703) 746-4919 (Fax)

National Food Safety Education Month

September is National Food Safety Education Month (NFSEM), and this year's topic is "Lesson's Learned from the Health Inspection".

All Environmental Health Specialists understand that an unexpected visit from the Health Department can cause a sense of panic even in the best run establishments. This short guide aims to remove some of the myths and give guidance on how to make it a more positive experience.

How often will you visit?
This depends on what type of business you operate and your previous inspection results. Generally, the better the business, the less you will see of your Environmental Health Specialist (EHS).

What should I do when the Environmental Health Specialist arrives?
Most EHS's will volunteer their credentials, but don't hesitate to ask for them if they don't. It can be unsafe to allow people into the back of your operation without the correct credentials.

Don't make EHS's wait while you try to clean up or fix problems. Hurrying to correct a mistake can actually make it worse. Be polite and friendly, and try to treat the EHS in the way that you would like to be treated. Remember that an EHS will try to help you wherever possible, and that a positive approach can make a real difference.

What will happen during the Inspection?
The EHS may ask you questions about your business and how you handle your food safely. They may also ask you to demonstrate actual food handling tasks. This helps the EHS understand how you do things, and to check that you have the correct safe food handling knowledge.

After the Inspection…
Act on the instructions and advice given by the EHS. Often they will come back and check that problems have been corrected: the sooner you act the sooner

If there is something that you haven't fully understood, or you need further advice, then contact your EHS for help. It is better to get in touch and ask for help, rather than wait for them to come back to your establishment. You can reach the Environmental Health Division at (703) 746-4910.

Further help and information on NFSEM can be found on the Servsafe Website: www.servsafe.com/nfsem/about.aspx

Food Safety Quiz – How would YOU handle these situations?

There was a knock at the back door of the establishment. Maria looked out the window and saw a man in a shirt and tie standing there with a clipboard in his hands. When she opened the door he told her his name was Bob Smith and he was from the local health department. Maria let the man into the establishment and asked him to wait while she went and got the manager.

While the EHS was inspecting the dish room, Steve hurried into the walk- in cooler to cover a tray of salads that he had prepped earlier. While in the cooler he noticed that the hanging thermometer was missing. He quickly got another one from the storeroom and hung it in the cooler.

The EHS asked Paul how he checked the strength of the sanitizer in the three-compartment sink. Paul wasn't sure how to answer because he had never done this before. Thinking quickly, he said that he filled the sink with cold water, and pressed the button to dispense the sanitizer. Then he said he had the manager check the sanitizer's strength, even though Paul never did this.

The EHS asked Jorge how he checked the temperature of hamburger patties on the grill. Jorge said he used a clean and sanitized digital thermometer to check the temperature of each patty. He also told the inspector that the patties had to be cooked to at least 155°F(68 °C). When asked, Jorge showed the inspector exactly how he did it.

The EHS asked Marcus, a prep cook, how he cleaned and sanitized the prep tables in the kitchen. Marcus considered himself a professional and didn't want to be bothered to answer the EHS's question. He was busy and was already behind schedule for the day. Marcus snapped back that he really didn't have time and that he cleaned and sanitized the tables the way the owner showed him how to do it. Then he left quickly.

Thank you to Rachel Stradling, Alexandria Health Department Medical Reserve Corps volunteer and Environmental Health Professional, for writing this issue's article on NFSEM and the Food Safety Quiz!

Did you know?

Lubricants used on food-contact surfaces, or on gears/bearings within equipment that has food-contact surfaces must be food grade. In other words, any lubricants used on deli slicers, soft-serve ice cream machines, meat grinders, meat saws, and dough mixers must be food grade. Using a lubricant that is NOT food grade may cause your food to become contaminated.

How can you find out if a lubricant is food grade?

1. Look at the container. Many labels will say if the lubricant is food grade.
2. Refer to "***21 CFR 178.3570 Lubricants with incidental food contact.***" This document lists lubricant ingredients that are food grade.
3. Call the Environmental Health Division (703.746.4910) and ask to speak with an Environmental Health Specialist. An Environmental Health Specialist will be happy to answer your question.

Please don't wait until you have sick customers to find out if your lubricant is food grade!