



# *Bon Appetit - Spring 2012*

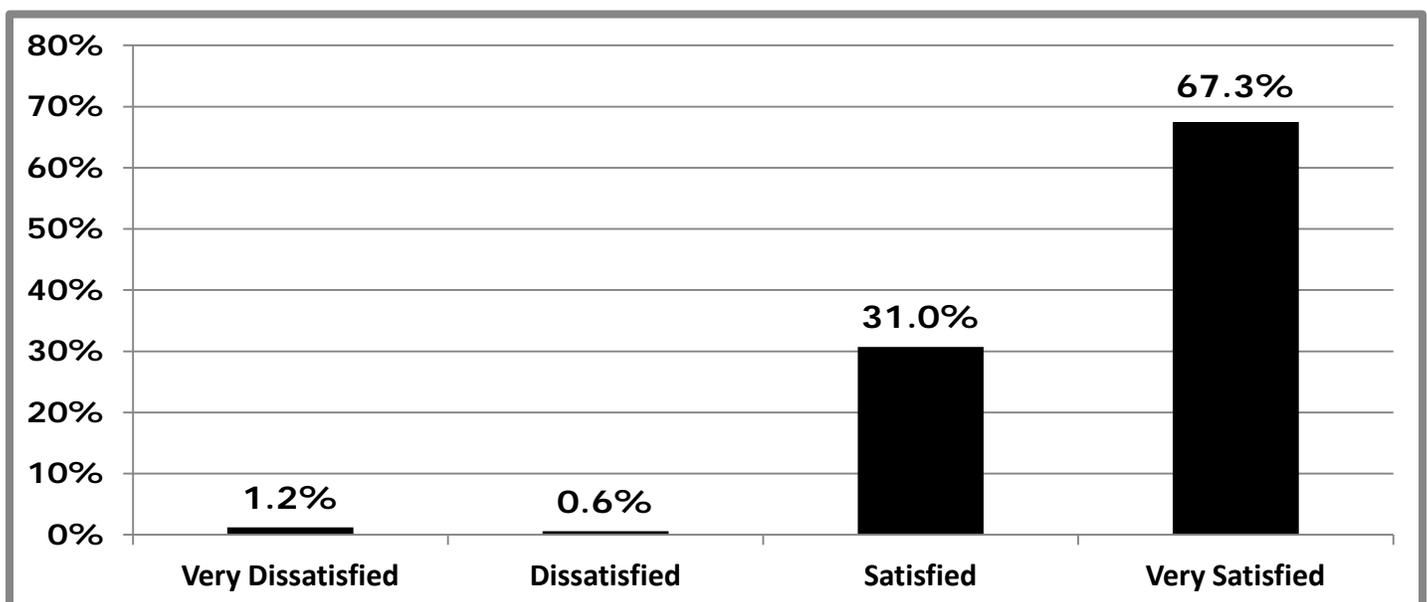
## **Customer Service Evaluation of the Alexandria Food Safety Program**

In January and February, 2012, the Environmental Health Division (EHD) conducted a customer service survey of food service facilities in Alexandria. Approximately 700 surveys were distributed with a pre-paid envelope so that responses could be returned anonymously. 173 (approximately 25%) of the surveys were returned.

The survey asked questions about the quality of the services provided by the Environmental Health Division and requested recommendations for improving the Food Safety Program. Below is a synopsis of what food facility owners and managers in Alexandria said and the EHD's action plan for addressing the recommendations for improvement:

### **Food Safety Program Strengths**

1. **Customer service** – Survey respondents overwhelmingly (>98%) were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the Food Safety Program services they received.



**Figure 1: Responses to the question “Overall, how satisfied were you with the Environmental Health services you received?”**

2. **Communications** – Survey respondents commended the EHD for how well it conveys information through its newsletter, website, and in person. More than 98% of the survey respondents were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with how well the EHD staff explained things to them. Numerous respondents commented on the willingness of their Environmental Health Specialist to answer questions, explain food safety principles or update them on food safety technology or regulations.
3. **Emergency response** – A number of respondents positively noted EHD's response to emergencies and recalls. Several noted the proactive communications before major storms, the recall alerts, and the follow-up after flooding and other disasters. One noted how helpful the EHD's 24/7 emergency response capability is in helping a restaurant get reopened when they have had to close due to an emergency.

4. **Professionalism of EH Division staff** – Many respondents commended the EHD staff for their helpful guidance and advice. Many others noted the sincere concern for the health of the public or the professionalism of their environmental health specialist. More than 98% of respondents rated the EHD staff as “always” or “usually” knowledgeable.

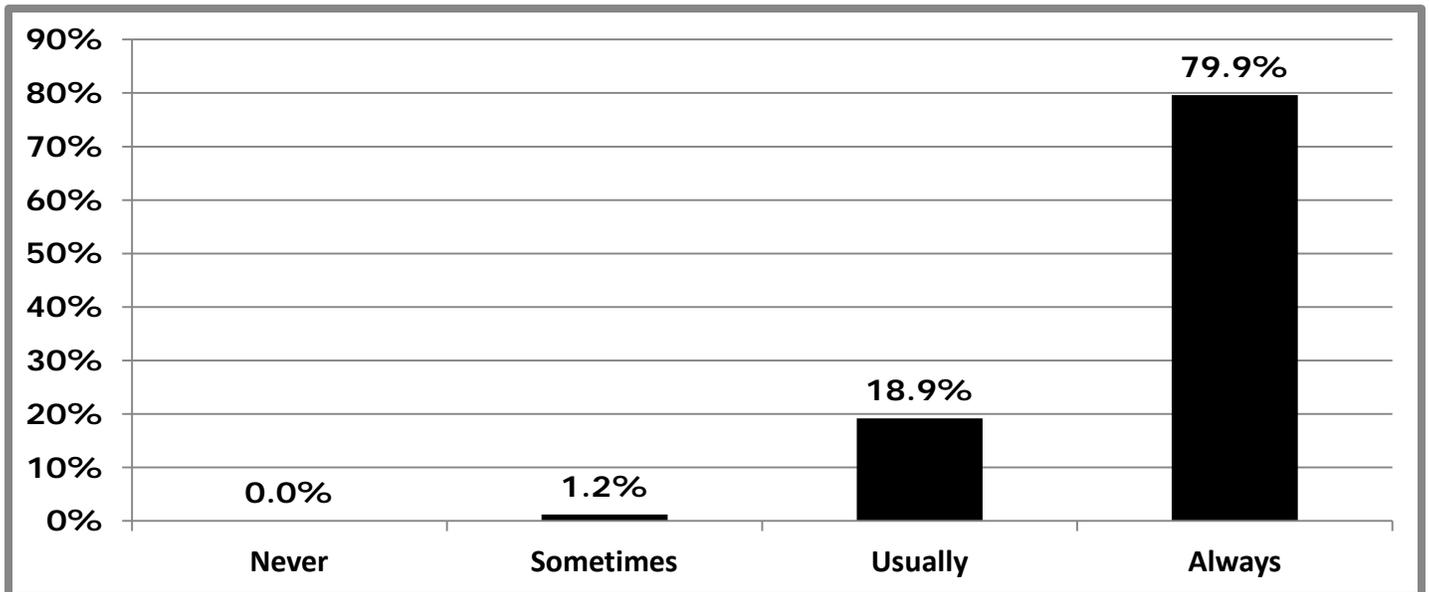


Figure 2: Responses to the question “Were the Environmental Health staff knowledgeable?”

5. **Training materials provided** – A number of respondents mentioned that the training materials (posters, labels, information sheets) provided by the EHD were very helpful. One respondent particularly commended the EHD for providing bilingual materials.
6. **Increased food safety awareness by food safety operators** – Numerous survey respondents commented that the services they received from the EHD helped them maintain the food safety awareness of their kitchen staff.
7. **Relationships based on mutual respect and fairness** –Several respondents commented on how important the relationship is between the EHD and the food service facilities it regulates. As one respondent said, “Inspectors treat the relationship between the (Health) Dept., licensees and the public as a partnership.” The survey respondents overwhelmingly believed that they were treated with fairness and respect.

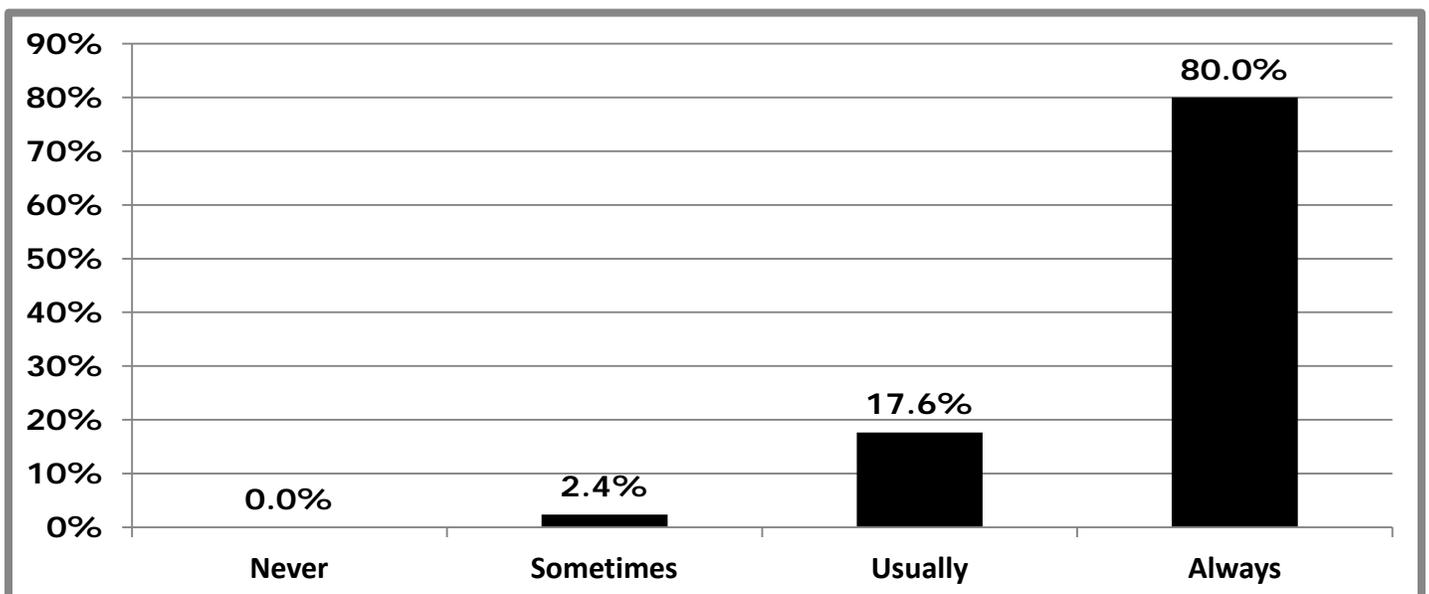


Figure 3: Responses to the question “Were you treated fairly and with respect?”

# **Action Plan for Food Safety Program Improvement**

As a result of the suggestions for improvement made by the survey respondents, the Food Safety Program will be making the following program enhancements:

## **1. Proactive, clear communications**

- ◆ The EHD will redesign its website over the coming year and post additional information and resources (including direct links to new policies or regulations)
- ◆ The information mailed out with the **FoodTalk** newsletter will be expanded
- ◆ EHD will explore how e-news and social media might be used to communicate more effectively with consumers and stakeholders

## **2. Permitting process**

- ◆ The EHD will work with the Alexandria Food Safety Advisory Council to develop a "New Facility Welcome Package"
- ◆ The EHD is working with the Alexandria Food Safety Advisory Council to develop a "Food Safety Reference Guide"
- ◆ The EHD will work closely with the City Permit Center to develop new guidance documents and flow charts to reduce confusion in the permitting process

## **3. Focus of food safety evaluations**

- ◆ EHD is now conducting predominantly risk-based evaluations that focus on public health interventions and risk factors for foodborne illness
- ◆ EHD trains environmental health specialists (EHSs) to be flexible and seek common sense solutions within the parameters of the Food Code
- ◆ EHD now requires a dialogue between the food service manager and the EHS during or after each evaluation to discuss any deficiencies observed
- ◆ EHD staff will encourage facilities to correct as many violations as possible during the evaluation. These will be noted as "corrected" on the evaluation report

## **4. Consistency of food safety evaluations**

- ◆ EHSs are regularly standardized in interpretation of the Food Code
- ◆ EHSs receive at least six hours of continuing education in food safety annually
- ◆ On a bimonthly basis, the EHD devotes a staff meeting to reviewing the Food Code and observed or perceived inconsistencies in Food Code interpretation
- ◆ Every few months, some of each EHS's evaluation reports are reviewed and scored for consistency in interpreting and applying the Food Code. These reviews are tied to each EHS's annual performance evaluation

## **5. Timing, frequency and scheduling of food safety evaluations**

- ◆ The EHD endeavors to evaluate food facilities at various stages during their preparation and service of food. Although some of these evaluations will be during meal periods, the EHD will try not to always come during a meal period
- ◆ The EHD will assess the risk of the food processes at each facility to determine the appropriate frequency of food safety evaluations. Unannounced risk-based evaluations will be conducted one to four times per year based on the assessed risk.
- ◆ Each facility may schedule one evaluation annually at a time that is most convenient to them and their management team

## **6. Training**

- ◆ The EHD will expand its efforts to provide posters and educational materials. When possible, these materials will be made available in multiple languages
- ◆ As resources permit, the EHD will provide on-demand training for individual food service facilities tailored to meet their specific needs or challenges
- ◆ The EHD will identify and, where possible, fill gaps in the training materials currently available

The complete **2012 Customer Service Evaluation of the Alexandria Food Safety Program** is available online at: <http://alexandriava.gov/health/info/default.aspx?id=59000>

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## **You May SCHEDULE Your Next Food Safety Evaluation**

Sometimes it is helpful to schedule your next Health Department food safety evaluation. By scheduling your next evaluation, you can arrange a convenient time to have your entire restaurant management team present so that you can get maximum value from the evaluation process. A scheduled evaluation allows you to focus on specific issues or processes. Although most evaluations are unannounced, you are invited (if you are not currently in the enforcement process) to schedule one evaluation annually. To schedule your next food safety evaluation, please call your Environmental Health Specialist at (703) 746-4910.

## **Special Events and Temporary Food Establishments**

There are many special events and festivals in the City during the year. Restaurants are often asked to participate in these events by preparing, cooking and/or serving food. If you are planning to prepare and/or serve food at a special event, please submit a Temporary Food Establishment Application to the Health Department at least 30 days before the event. If you have any questions about the application or temporary food establishment requirements, please call (703) 746-4910. The Temporary Event Food Vendor application form is available online at:  
[http://alexandriava.gov/health/info/default.aspx?id=40656#Permits\\_TempEvent](http://alexandriava.gov/health/info/default.aspx?id=40656#Permits_TempEvent)

## **Catering Services**

When food establishments are initially permitted, the Health Department makes sure that food can be stored, prepared, cooked, and served safely within the food establishment. If you are permitted as a Caterer, we also look at your ability to prepare, deliver, and/or serve food at other locations. If you are not permitted as a Caterer and you would like to offer Catering services, please contact the Health Department at (703) 746-4910 so that we may review the Catering requirements with you.

## **On-Demand Training Provided by the Health Department**

If your food service staff would benefit from a training session on a specific topic – hand washing, Employee Health Policy, temperature measurement and monitoring, rapid cooling, etc. – the Health Department is willing and able to provide this type of training for your staff. To request a training session, please call (703) 746-4910.

## **Certified Food Manager Training Required**

Whenever a food facility is preparing or serving food, it must be under the direct supervision of a Certified Food Manager (CFM). Training to prepare for the Certified Food Manager exam is provided by numerous private local providers. A listing of these providers can be found at:  
<http://alexandriava.gov/FoodSafety#CFM>.

## **How Does the Health Department Determine Evaluation Frequency?**

The Health Department assesses food facilities to evaluate the potential risks of the food preparation processes carried out in them. Facilities that do not serve products requiring time/temperature control for safety (TCS) are evaluated once per year. Facilities that prepare foods requiring TCS, but which don't need to cook foods in order to destroy possible pathogens are evaluated twice per year. Facilities that cook TCS foods to destroy possible pathogens and then serve them immediately are evaluated three times per year. Facilities that cook TCS foods to destroy possible pathogens and then cool and hold those foods for service at a later time are evaluated four times per year.