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No Reservations

No Reservations **is a monthly newsletter published by RQA Inc. for the restaurant industry.**

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Foreign Objects

After foodborne illness, foreign objects or physical contaminates in food is one of the leading complaints from consumers each year. The U.S. Food & Drug Administration found that approximately one-quarter of all food related complaints it received one year involved the presence of a visible foreign contaminant. This same study indicated that nearly 15% of the complainants had reportedly suffered an injury or illness which they attributed to the foreign material. An estimated 1,500 deaths occur annually from foreign object ingestion in the U.S.

Physical contaminates may include: metal shavings from cans; staples from boxes; glass; blades from plastic scrapers or from metal box cutters; fingernails; wood, splinters; hair, and bandages; dirt; bones; rocks, etc. Glass is the most frequently reported foreign material in food to cause injury or illness. Foreign objects in a food or beverage may cause a laceration, choking (According to the CDC, more than three-fourths of all choking episodes involved children aged three or younger.), or food poisoning.

The FDA considers a product adulterated if it contains a hard or sharp foreign object that measures 7 mm to 25 mm in length, and is ready-to-eat or requires only minimal preparation steps that would not eliminate, invalidate or neutralize the hazard prior to consumption. Foreign objects smaller than 7 mm rarely cause trauma or serious injury except in special high-risk groups, such as infants, surgery patients and the elderly.

Restaurants and foodservice facilities need to protect their food from foreign objects and/or physical contamination. The first step is to develop a supplier selection program. Restaurant and food service facilities must ensure that the food they purchase from their suppliers is wholesome and safe. This includes the absence of foreign objects in the food. As suppliers are selected, management of the restaurant/foodservice facility should require the supplier to provide proof that they (the suppliers) are in compliance with all Federal, State, and Local laws. The supplier may provide recent food safety audits from their regulatory agency, a statement that they have a HACCP or Food Safety Plan, Certificate of Analysis (COA), a statement that they have third party food safety audits performed within their facility, etc. as proof they are a reputable supplier.

The second step is to ensure that all of the food contact equipment is in good repair, and your foodhandlers have been properly trained on how to store, use, and clean the food contact equipment. The training should include when the equipment must be discarded. Recently, a nationally recognized pizza chain franchisee was sued after a guest accidently consumed pieces of wire bristles. The wire bristles allegedly came from the wire grill brush used to clean the pizza oven. The guest was hospitalized and required emergency surgery.

Lastly, each restaurant/food service facility should implement a Food Defense Plan that addresses the intentional contamination of food. Unfortunately, this issue is most often the result of a disgruntled employee, and restaurant/food service facility management must take appropriate steps to control this issue. Remember, once any plan is developed and implemented into your facility, proper training must be performed for the management and staff.

Testing for Product Contaminants

- Glass Identification – Tests can be done to determine the origin of glass contaminants by:
  - Definitively identifying a foreign substance as glass
  - Determining the source of glass
- Metal Identification – Reflected light, electron microscopy and X-ray microanalysis are employed to determine:
  - The metal type
  - The metal class
  - The suspected source through comparative analysis
- Pharmaceuticals – Tablets and capsules are commonly encountered in all types of products.
  - Active and inactive ingredients can be identified through a variety of analytical techniques.
  - Internal reference collections are used that include over 15,000 physical and electronic records of approved and illicit drugs.
- Insects – Insects found in a product can be tested to determine:
  - The species or family of insect
  - Geographic origin and association with specific raw materials
  - Point of contamination (before or after heat processing)
- Hairs and Fibers – Analytical tests can be run for hairs and fibers found in products to:
  - Identify and source natural & synthetic fibers
  - Identify and characterize animal and human hair
- Polymers and Plastics – Polymers and plastics are a growing source for contamination.
  - Tests identify and assist in sourcing.
  - Large physical references are used for identification.
- General Unknowns – General unknowns including powders, residues and liquids arise in every industry. Unknown samples of any size or composition can be accurately identified through proper testing by experts in the field.

Sources:

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Supermarket Deli, Tinley Park , IL. December 2014

A Tinley Park woman who says she became ill with salmonella after eating food from a Tinley Park supermarket deli is suing the supermarket chain. In the two-count lawsuit, filed Tuesday in Cook County, the woman alleged the supermarket was negligent and is liable for the harm caused by "an unsafe and defective food product." The woman suffered nausea, diarrhea, fever, fatigue, muscle pain and abdominal cramps after eating food from the deli May 9, about a month before public health officials began investigating a salmonella outbreak linked to the Tinley Park supermarket's deli, according to the lawsuit.

The woman's attorney said she went to the emergency room, was diagnosed with salmonella and spent eight days in the hospital. He said she was a loyal customer who bought lunch from the deli several times a week. They do not know what she ate that was contaminated with salmonella, her attorney said.

Cook County Department of Public Health officials said in June that they were investigating a salmonella outbreak potentially linked to the supermarket in Tinley Park after 15 people became ill, four of whom were hospitalized.

Supermarket officials temporarily closed the store's service deli June 11 "out of an abundance of caution," the store's spokeswoman said at the time. The attorney said the number of similar cases among the store's customers was "not a coincidence." "I believe the facts will demonstrate staff failed to adequately prepare, cook and refrigerate the food that was available to customers of the deli," he said.

A statement from the supermarket said the company had not seen the lawsuit and was unable to comment on specific details, but spokeswoman said county health officials had found evidence of salmonella at their Tinley Park store. The woman's suit is at least the second filed as a result of the incident, the attorney said. Another woman, of Tinley Park, sued the store in June alleging food from its deli caused her 11-year-old son to be hospitalized with a salmonella infection.

http://www.chicagotribune.com

Cafe, Inwood, NY. December 2014

INWOOD — The Health Department closed neighborhood mainstay café after inspectors found evidence of mice and other sanitary issues in the space during a Monday inspection. The restaurant was hit with 64 violation points for problems including evidence of mice, foods kept at improper temperatures and a lack of a proper sanitation system for the utensil washing area, according to Health Department records.

The café is an American bistro that offers burgers, pasta and seafood. The restaurant is also known for its scenic patio, which is partially enclosed during winter months.

The restaurant's last graded inspection in April 2014 resulted in 11 violation points, which earned the café an "A" grade. However, during an ungraded inspection on Nov. 10, the café racked up 32 violation points, many for the same problems noted in the December inspection.

The owner could not immediately be reached for comment.

The family operates two other restaurants in the neighborhood. According to Health Department records, one of the restaurants earned an "A" on its most recent inspection by the agency. The second restaurant displayed an "A" grade sign in its front window Wednesday, but no information about the restaurant was available on the Health Department's website. A Health Department representative was looking into the issue.

On Wednesday, the cafe's metal gate was pulled halfway shut, with a yellow notice from the Health Department posted on the restaurant's locked door. An employee who answered the door said he was not sure when the café would reopen and declined to comment on the inspection.

http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/2014

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