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No Reservations

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

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Go With The Flow: Kitchen Design and Food Safety

Maximizing profitability, optimizing employee efficiency, and protecting your business from a foodborne illness outbreak all begin with a well-designed kitchen. While there are countless factors that can affect operations and the food preparation process, this article focuses on kitchen design as it relates to factors that can influence food safety.

Even though kitchen designs are dictated by space, equipment and budget, there are fundamental recommendations that should be considered to facilitate general food protection. At the most basic level, provisions that promote good hygienic practices and reduce the risk of cross contamination are essential. As indicated in the 2009 FDA Food Code, handwashing sinks should be conveniently located in every room where food preparation and dishwashing occurs. When determining the number and placement of hand sinks, always consider the maximum number of employees working per shift and the complexity of the foods being served.

The risk of cross contamination can be minimized with efficient floor plans that provide adequate physical separation between food products and sources of contamination. The flow of food, employee traffic patterns, and the complexity of the menu are all factors that need to be considered when determining the best layout of food preparation areas. For example, an assembly-line workstation is a highly efficient design for a sandwich shop whereby employees simply produce similar items from ready-to-eat foods. Conversely, for a restaurant offering a diverse menu, separate workstations (zone layout) would be more appropriate for minimizing the risk of cross contamination between finished and raw products. Additionally, no matter what type of design, employee traffic should be kept to a minimum in food preparation areas to decrease the potential of contaminated items coming into contact with food and food contact surfaces.

Lastly, efficient cleaning and preventing time-temperature abuse are also food safety factors that can be influenced by kitchen design. Accessibility and convenient location of equipment are key concepts that can enhance sanitation efforts and minimize the amount of time food spends in the temperature danger zone.

In short, the next time you are analyzing the operations of your business, consider starting with the basics – the design and layout of your kitchen.

The Food Establishment Plan Review Guide

Whether you are designing a new facility, remodeling an old one, or trying to make the most of your existing space, following some basic guidelines may help you save precious time and money. The Food Establishment Plan Review Guide, developed by the FDA and the Conference for Food Protection, is a comprehensive reference that can help you get off to a good start. Even before putting pen to paper, this guide can help you establish a design that will facilitate an organized and efficient flow of food. Because the guide is intended for both foodservice establishments and regulatory health authorities, it can assist you in determining whether your design ideas will comply with nationally recognized food safety standards. Also, by familiarizing yourself with design, installation, and construction recommendations, you may be able to protect yourself from potentially disappointing setbacks.

Of course, before starting any project, check with your local regulatory authority to see if your design plans need approval. Even if approval is not necessary, avoid future problems by asking your regulatory authority to review your plans before costly decisions are made. This will also bolster your relationship with your local health department by establishing your strong desire to provide a clean and safe environment for the preparation of food.

Reference:

U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Northeast Region Plan Review Development Committee for the Conference for Food Protection. Food Establishment Plan Review Guide (2000). Available at: http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/RetailFoodProtection/ComplianceEnforcement/ucm101639.htm

By: Ellen Steinberg

Asian Restaurant in Columbus, OH. — May 2012

The Columbus Board of Health revoked this facilities permit for the second time within the past six months. The restaurant was closed down due to a "Lack of food safety knowledge, improper holding temperatures of the potentially hazardous food and Improper handwashing." At this time, the facility remains closed.

Reported by wpxi.com/news/local/health-department

Italian Restaurant in New York City, NY. — May 2012

This facility as well as five other restaurants were ordered closed by the New York Department of Health in this area of the city. The Italian Restaurant received a score of 63 violation points, an automatic failure. This restaurant and the five other restaurants were reopened a few days later.

Reported by http://myupperwest.com

Miami Bay Restaurants, Miami, FL. — May 2012

Eight separate facilities in this area were ordered closed by the health department of Miami. Violations cited were improper holding temperatures of potentially hazardous food; unsanitary conditions; and in one location, 20 live cockroaches were observed at the time of the inspection. All restaurants were allowed to reopen the next day after correcting the violations cited.

Reported by www.melggroup.com

Vietnamese Restaurant, Lawrenceville, PA. — March 2012

This facility closed down due to potentially hazardous food held at unsafe temperatures, issues of cross contamination, no presence of a certified food handler onsite and several alleged foodborne illness complaints. At this time the foodborne illness complaints have not been confirmed. The restaurant will remain closed until it is cleared by the Allegheny County Health Department.

Reported by www.wpxi.com

Mexican Restaurant, Baltimore, MD. — March 2012

This facility was closed down due to a lack of hot water. It was later reopened once the hot water tank was repaired.

Reported by www.baltimorehealth.org

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