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No Reservations

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

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The Inspection Process: Recommendations to Consider

As you are well aware, enduring a food safety inspection is stressful at best or catastrophic at worst. However, while regulations and inspection guidelines vary from state to state, there are some basic recommendations you can follow to help make the process as painless as possible.

Whether your restaurant is undergoing an internal, third-party, or health department inspection, make sure your employees understand the inspection process and know who is in charge in your absence. Because inspectors typically arrive without warning, be prepared by performing continuous self-inspections to demonstrate that cleanliness and safe food handling practices are expected and monitored on a continual basis. Additionally, always keep records (such as, purchasing, pest control, and MSDS) updated, organized and readily available.

Upon arrival of a public health inspector, always ask for identification. Request this information politely and also ask them the reason for the inspection. While most inspections are routine, it is best to have a clear understanding about the nature of their visit before they enter the kitchen. Always allow the health inspector to enter because, in some areas, your operation's permit can be revoked for refusing entry to an inspector.

Accompany the inspector throughout the process and provide full cooperation. Having an attitude or being disrespectful will get you nowhere. Alternatively, be polite and friendly and make every attempt to build a professional working relationship with the inspector. Take notes of any problems that are pointed out and express a willingness to fix the issue. However, if you feel the inspector is incorrect or unfair, document the event and then contact the regulatory authority.

Lastly, before signing the inspection report, check it for accuracy and discuss the violations and time frames for correction. It is critical that you understand the exact nature of a violation, how it affects food safety, how to correct it, and whether a follow-up inspection will occur. Review the report with your employees and determine why the violations occurred. Try to identify gaps in your master cleaning schedule or operational procedures and be willing to retrain employees, if necessary.

Restaurant inspection reports are considered public documents. As such, many patrons reference these reports the minute they walk into a foodservice establishment. Furthermore, because many jurisdictions post inspection reports on the internet, some people will not even step foot inside a restaurant before checking out the inspection report. Thus, while public health should always be your primary concern, also consider that your inspection report can be either a guaranteed deterrent or an excellent marketing tool.

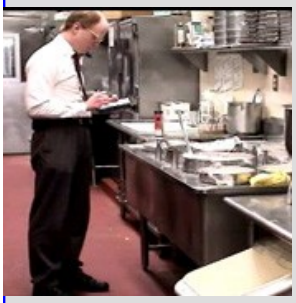


Self-Inspections: Practice Makes Perfect

There are numerous benefits to be gained by performing regular self-inspections of your establishment. First and foremost, it will help you identify and correct any potential food safety issues that could threaten the health of your customers. From a financial standpoint, self-inspections can save your resources (time and money) by allowing you to address small problems before they become costly or time consuming to rectify. In addition, you will also enjoy the benefit of higher regulatory inspection scores.

Design and conduct your self-inspection using the same type of checklist used by the health inspector. Start outside of the establishment and work your way inside. Mix it up a bit and enter through different doors to get a more thorough picture about the condition of your establishment. Conduct your inspections during varying shifts to be able to assess the behaviors of your entire staff. Do not be afraid to quiz your employees to gauge their knowledge about key food safety issues. Lastly, meet with your staff on a regular basis to review any problems and praise their strengths.

Strive to exceed the standards set by the regulatory authorities. Perform inspections weekly and address maintenance issues or food handling violations immediately. Then, when the health inspector arrives at your door, greet them with a smile instead of a look of fear.



Reference: National Restaurant Association. ServSafe® Coursebook 5th edition 2010 Chicago, IL

By: Ellen Steinberg

Seafood Restaurant, Seattle, WA. July 2012

This facility was closed by the health department due to potentially hazardous food being held within the temperature danger zone, inadequate facilities to maintain the potentially hazardous food outside of the temperature danger zone and operating without a valid permit.

Reference: C:\Users\s.conners\Desktop\Newsletter\August 2012\Food establishment closures in King County_aspx.mht

Vietnamese Restaurant, San Francisco, CA. July 2012

A San Francisco Vietnamese restaurant that has dished out peppered beef, fried rice and ginger fried fish for decades shut its doors Friday, thanks to its fourth temporary closure in the past year and a half for major health violations, authorities said.

Health department inspectors found potentially hazardous food holding at improper temperatures, improper hand washing stations and the presence of cockroaches and mice.

A notice of violation dated Friday was taped to the front of the restaurant and said the restaurant's permit had been suspended due to "serious or repeated" health violations and that the restaurant was closed until further notice.

This restaurant has been shut down for a day or two in January 2011, September 2011, April 2012 and again Friday. Each time, inspectors found different combinations of the same health violations, including live mice and cockroaches in the cooking areas, standing water in the kitchen, improper refrigeration and unsanitary food handling. "They had eggs sitting out for three, four days" a health inspector reported. Workers "weren't washing their hands—they were scratching themselves and handling food."

The health department stated the this restaurant will remain closed until it can show a clean enough kitchen to re-open. But given the high number of major violations in the past 18 months, the restaurant also faces a hearing where it could have its permit revoked.

Reference: http://www.sfgate.com/restaurants/article/Tu-Lan-closed-for-health-violations-3748079.php

Mexican Restaurant, Sacramento, CA. July 2012

This facility was closed down due to the presence of pests. The facility was reopened the following day.

Reference: Sacramento County Environmental Management Department, Environmental Health Division

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