Benton County Environmental Health

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FOOD SAFETY FOCUS

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Flu Season is Coming !!

Scott Kruger, REHS - Benton County, Oregon

Do all your management staff and employees understand their reporting responsibilities when they become ill?

Let's face the facts; people need to work to maintain their households. This means that often employees will come to work with symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhea and do the best they can to go unnoticed, because they need the money.

- This is where things can go seriously wrong.
- If these employees are allowed to work, the risk to the facility and the customers increases greatly.

If an employee has sore throat with a fever, vomiting, diarrhea or has yellowing skin or eyes they should be excluded from working in the facility.

- If an employee is not going to the doctor for vomiting and diarrhea issues, the food code requires that they stay home for at least 24 hours after their symptoms are gone.
- This is to stop the spread of Norovirus.

We see reported cases of Norovirus more frequently in flu season when people's immune symptoms are weakened. However it happens throughout the year.

One hundred percent of the foodborne illness outbreaks in Benton County over the last 10 years have been due to Norovirus transmission.

- Frequently from food service workers who were ill, having bare hand contact with food with hands that have not been washed.
- That's right; those people who ate the food and got sick ate human feces or vomitus from improperly washed hands. This is very dangerous.
- People die each year from complications due to Norovirus.

Train your management staff and employees to not work when they are sick.

Offer sick pay if you can, but first and foremost keep them away from food service activities.

We have included an employee's reporting agreement for your review.

- This is a good tool to use in an employee orientation packet and for general illness policy training.
- It explains about symptoms that an employee must report and exclude themselves from work. It also explains about reportable diseases such as Salmonella, E-Coli, Hepatitis A, Shigella and Norovirus and steps to be taken.

Please go to this link at the Center for Disease Control for more information on Norovirus.

http://www.cdc.gov/norovirus/index.html

Food Safety Education

Food Handler Classes

Food handler classes are held on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays in English, and every Friday at 1:30 in Spanish.

Thursdays (English)	9:30am & 3:30pm
Fridays (Spanish)	1:30pm

Food Handler Online

http://www.co.benton.or.us/health/environmental health/food.php

Annex Form 1-B

Food Employee Reporting Agreement

Preventing Disease Transmission through Food by Infected Food Employees

The purpose of this agreement is to inform food employees of their responsibility to notify the person in charge when they experience any of the conditions listed below so that the person in charge can take appropriate steps to preclude the transmission of foodborne illness.

I AGREE TO REPORT TO THE PERSON IN CHARGE:

Any onset of the following symptoms, either while at work or outside of work, including the date symptoms began:

1. **Diarrhea**
2. **Vomiting**
3. **Jaundice (yellowing of skin or eyes)**
4. **Sore throat with fever**
5. **Infected cuts or wounds, or lesions containing pus on the hand, wrist, or other exposed body part**

Future Medical Diagnosis:

Whenever diagnosed as being ill with **Norovirus, typhoid fever (*Salmonella* Typhi), shigellosis (*Shigella* spp. Infection), *Escherichia coli* 0157:H7 or other EHEC/STEC infection, or hepatitis A virus**

Future Exposure to Foodborne Pathogens:

1. Exposure to or suspicion of causing any confirmed disease outbreak of Norovirus, typhoid fever, shigellosis, *E. coli* 0157:H7 or other EHEC/STEC infection, or hepatitis A
2. A household member diagnosed with Norovirus, typhoid fever, shigellosis, *E. coli* 0157:H7, or hepatitis A
3. A household member attending or working in a setting experiencing a confirmed disease outbreak of Norovirus, typhoid fever, shigellosis, *E. coli* 0157:H7, or hepatitis A

I have read (or had explained to me) and understand the requirements concerning my responsibilities under the Food Code and this agreement to comply with:

1. Reporting requirements specified above involving symptoms, diagnoses, and exposure specified;
2. Work restrictions or exclusions that are imposed upon me; and
3. Good hygienic practices

I understand that failure to comply with the terms of this agreement could lead to action by the food establishment or the food regulatory authority that may jeopardize my employment and may involve legal action against me.

(Please print)

Food Employee Name: _____ **Signature:** _____ **Date:** _____

Person in Charge: _____ **Signature:** _____ **Date:** _____

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When Am I Supposed to Clean That?

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Sometimes sections of the food code can be complicated and hard to understand.

Oregon Food Code 4-602.11 is no exception. This particular code describes when food contact surfaces should be sanitized.

- Of course there is a difference when the surface of the utensil touches a potentially hazardous food verses a non-potentially hazardous food,
- Whether or not you are working in a cold room,
- Storing your utensils in heated water above 135 F or ice at 41 F and below,
- Standing on right leg while flipping a burger talking to your co-worker whose arm must be at a forty-five degree angle following the suns path from east to west. You get my point.

I have provided the link to the Oregon Food Code 4-602.11 (2 pages).

The most important element of the code you need to understand is whether or not the food that touched the utensils is potentially hazardous or not.

- If the utensil potentially hazardous food the utensils must be washed, rinsed, sanitized and air dried at least every four hours unless the utensil is under temperature control such as a ladle in soup at or above 135 F or a serving spoon in ice at or below 41 F. Then it must be sanitized when the product is finished but at least every 24 hours.
- If the food is not potentially hazardous then the utensils must be washed, rinsed, sanitized and air dried at least every 24 hours.
- The most common items would be knives and cutting boards.
- Don't forget about thermometers. They are a food contact surface too! You may sanitize your thermometer with a clean cloth in sanitizer at the appropriate concentration or an alcohol swab, which is what we use.

Each time a utensil touches a raw animal food it must be sanitized before it touches a ready to food and between cutting different types of raw animal foods, unless done is succession, like cutting fish before cutting chicken on the same board.

- Fish requires a minimum cooking temperature of 145 F,
- while chicken requires a minimum cooking temperature of 165 F.
- So essentially, bacteria from the fish would be killed by the higher cooking temperature of chicken.
- Although one could make a strong case for not wanting chicken that tastes like fish.

Give this code a read. As always, if you are having trouble interpreting the food codes give us a call or send us an e-mail. We would be glad to assist you. The food code is not a dark secret for us to know and you to figure out.

- A great idea is to save the food code to your desktop.
- When you open the PDF file click on the edit tab and go to find, a search box will appear in the upper right corner that you can type in a specific code number or a key word.
- It will search the entire document for where the key word or code is cited.
- As well, you can go the back of the codebook and look for key words in the index to help you find what you are looking for.

http://public.health.oregon.gov/HealthyEnvironments/FoodSafety/Documents/foodsanitationrulesweb.pdf

Temperature Logs

Scott Kruger, REHS - Benton County, Oregon

On many routine inspections, we find temperature abuse issues with refrigeration and hot holding equipment.

- Often there is no temperature log to support how long the food has been out of temperature control.
- If you don't know, than neither do we and the food must be discarded.
- If we are talking about a walk-in refrigerator this can be a very grim situation. We are talking about the potential loss of hundreds, if not thousands of dollars of food.
- By monitoring temperatures on a regular and frequent basis, we recommend two to four hours; then corrective action could have been taken to save the food and protect your customers from a foodborne illness.

A temperature log is an extremely valuable tool. It literally takes minutes each day to fill out and can save the potential loss of valuable food commodities that you paid good money for and not to mention labor cost to prepare.

Every day each hot and cold holding unit in your location should be verified as functioning.

- For refrigeration equipment, start of each day by reading the internal or external thermometer just to verify quickly that it appears to be operational.
- Once prep work begins, say around 10 am and refrigeration begins to be opened and closed, this is a good time to take your food probe thermometer and document some representative samples.
- Never during an inspection will the inspector solely look at an ambient air thermometer, say looks good to me, and move on.
- One hundred percent of the time you will see the inspector probe food and you should too.
- This should be done again at the hottest part of the day say around 4 pm.

A final temperature control check should be done before closing. **This is your last best opportunity to take corrective action that could save thousands of dollars of product.**

- Once hot holding unit are filled this is a good time to document temperature as well.
- You may catch that reheated items were not heated properly to 165 f for hot holding.
- You should check hot holding units every two hours to insure food stays above 135 f and allow time for corrective action to be taken.

If food is found to be out of temperature for four hours or longer it has to be discarded.

- Here's why, a bacteria in a four hour time frame will not replicate itself enough to make a healthy adult sick but from four hours to 10 hours because bacteria grow logarithmically (two become four and four become eight, etc.)
- The bacteria will replicate itself into the millions which is enough of a dose to make an healthy adult very sick.

You should document your findings and record them.

- Here's the catch, what is going to be done when a deviation from the standard is documented?

For example you find food above 41 F in a refrigerator or hot food below 135 F.

- Ask questions about who, what, when, where, why and how this food is out of temperature control.

We often see temperatures logs with these deviations with no notes on what was done to correct them. **(Continued on page 5)**

(Continued from page 4)

We are not saying something wasn't done, it just that good documentation help protect you from liabilities that could occur if someone were to potentially sue your facility for a foodborne illness claim.

Having a documented temperature can also save you from potential losses that I mentioned earlier.

If deviations are noted early and management notified, corrective actions could possibly be taken.

- This would include moving food to another working unit,
- utilizing freezers as a temporary measure to rapidly chill food or
- getting in a repair person to fix the unit and get temperature back in line quickly.

Temperature logs are not a requirement of the food code.

But ask yourself, **am I really doing all I can to protect my customers health by not maintaining a temperature log?**

Benton County's Food Safety Alerting System

We use this email listserv to send out emails regarding recalls and food safety issues that affect Benton County.

If you would like to be added to our email group call: 541-766-6841

FDA's Recall Website

http://www.fda.gov/Safety/Recalls/default.htm

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Food Safety Focus!