

## FOOD SAFETY REGULATIONS

Restaurants are inspected not only to protect the public's health but also to help restaurant managers identify potential food safety problems. When an inspector comes into your restaurant to conduct an inspection, he or she will:

- evaluate whether you are meeting minimum sanitation and food safety standards;
- require you to provide food that is safe, uncontaminated, and presented properly; and
- provide you with a written report, noting deficiencies, so that you can bring your restaurant into compliance with minimum sanitation and food safety standards.

### Government Regulations

Government regulations of food in the US are at three levels: federal, state, and local. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are the two federal agencies involved in the inspection of food establishments.

*U.S. Department of Agriculture.* The USDA is responsible for the inspection and quality grading of meat, meat products, poultry, dairy products, eggs and egg products, and fruit and vegetables shipped across state lines. If these foods are not to be shipped across state lines, then the State Department of Agriculture (such as the NC Department of Agriculture) is responsible for inspecting them.

*Food and Drug Administration.* The FDA inspects all other food processing plants. The FDA is the author of the *Food Code*, which is the basis of most food protection certification training programs.

*Local Foodservice Regulations.* Most regulations affecting restaurants are written at the state level and are enforced by local or state health departments. City, county, or state health inspectors (also called sanitarians, health officials, or environmental health specialists) conduct foodservice inspections in most states.

### The Food Code

The *Food Code* was written by the FDA and is reviewed and modified on a regular basis. It is a model document for foodservice regulations. It is intended to help state health departments develop regulations for their foodservice inspection program. The FDA recommends adoption of the *Food Code* but cannot require it. The *Food Code* covers the following areas:

- *Food handling and preparation* -- sources, receiving, storage, display, service, and transportation
- *Personnel* -- health, personal cleanliness, clothing, hygiene practices
- *Equipment and utensils* -- materials, design, installation, storage
- *Cleaning and sanitizing* -- facilities and equipment
- *Utilities and services* -- water, sewage, plumbing, restrooms, waste disposal, integrated pest management (IPM)
- *Construction and maintenance* -- floors, walls, ceilings, lighting, ventilation, dressing rooms, locker areas, storage areas
- *Foodservice units* -- mobile and temporary units
- *Compliance procedures* -- foodservice inspections and enforcement actions

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## **Foodservice Inspection Process**

Restaurant managers should perform continuous self-inspection programs to keep food safe. In addition, the health department will perform regular inspections. The inspector will use the local health code as a guide. Suggestions for a successful inspection:

- Ask the inspector for identification.
- Cooperate with the inspector and instruct your workers to do so.
- Take notes about any problems noted by the inspector.
- Keep the relationship professional. Do not offer food or drink before, during, or after the inspection.
- Be prepared to provide records requested by the inspector.
- Discuss violations and time frames for correcting problems with the inspector.
- Follow up to correct problems and critical violations.

## **Closure**

If the inspector determines that the restaurant poses an immediate health hazard, a suspension of the permit to operate may be issued. Examples of health hazards include:

- inadequate refrigeration;
- backup of sewage into the establishment itself or its water supply;
- emergency, such as building fire or flood;
- serious infestation of insects or rodents; and
- long interruption of electrical or water service.

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