Self-Inspection Guidance for Food Service Operations

The saying "practice makes perfect" holds true with health inspections. The best way to prepare for an inspection is by performing a self-inspection every week. Here are some helpful tips to keep in mind while performing your self-inspection:

- **Make it unannounced.** Most of the time, routine inspections are unannounced, so pick a random day in the week to surprise your employees with an inspection. This will facilitate proper food handling practices day in and day out.
- **Have proper inspection tools.** Some of the common tools an inspector will carry are a digital pocket thermometer, flashlight, clipboard, alcohol wipes, chemical test strips and inspection forms. Using these tools will assure that you are as accurate and true to the process as you can be.
- **Use the local inspection sheet.** Using the same sheet as your health inspector will allow you to know exactly what they are looking for and the severity of each violation. Most health inspectors will have extra forms and should be happy to provide you with some copies for your own inspections.
- **Start outside.** The first thing an inspector sees is the outside of your establishment, and exterior cleanliness is crucial as it offers the ever important first impression. Entering through the front door also allows you to better assume the role of a health inspector.
- **Get out the white glove.** Perhaps the best method to assure that your restaurant will pass an inspection is by being extremely thorough in your self-inspections. You will never find everything to be perfect, but striving for perfection will show your employees and inspector that you are serious about running a safe, healthy business.
- **Quiz employees.** During an inspection, the health official will often ask employees questions about the task they are currently performing. Asking workers task oriented and safety questions will keep the knowledge fresh in their minds and help gauge if your training techniques are effective.
- **Check the records.** Your inspector may ask for any temperature, employee illness, handwashing, training or HACCP records that you have to assure that you are properly monitoring safety practices. Taking time to check over these records yourself keeps them properly ordered and on hand for when the inspector arrives.
- **Point out good and bad behaviors.** Positive reinforcement is a proven teaching method and will help foster employee happiness and loyalty, so point out when an employee is doing something correctly. When an employee is performing a task incorrectly, take the time to explain the proper behavior.
- **Correct mistakes on the spot.** Let your workers know about any easy to fix violations to facilitate employee watchfulness.
- **Have a staff meeting afterwards.** Use this time to go over your inspection findings with employees. Again, point out both positive and negative habits. Spend some time explaining proper practices, so your employees understand why a certain action is required.

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