



# COWLITZ COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Volume 5

## THE LOADED TABLE

February 2011

### “IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING” CAMPAIGN

In an effort to improve awareness and reporting of suspicious activity, national food industry partners recently worked with the Department of Homeland Security and other federal agencies to develop a one-page document highlighting indicators of suspicious activities and recommended protective measures. These efforts are part of the “If You See Something, Say Something” Campaign. This document is the first in a series of related outreach documents and is targeted for Food Service Establishments.

The document is intended to be posted in work areas within food service establishments so employees are aware of what they should be looking for and what actions should be taken if they observe something suspicious. Food establishment

managers are also encouraged to include the information within the one-page document during staff meetings and trainings.

This is also a good time to remind everyone of the critical importance of taking immediate action when consumer complaints of “food poisoning” or foodborne illness are reported. All food establishments should quickly relay all such reports to the appropriate local health jurisdiction (LHJ), and all LHJ’s must promptly respond to such reports. Whether the cause of the illness is later determined to be a result of intentional or unintentional contamination, our rapid actions can (and do) prevent additional, unnecessary illnesses and fatalities.

To access the document please visit our website  
<http://www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/health/environmentalhealth/food/food.htm>

### PROGRAM CONTACT INFO

**Environmental Health Lead**  
Audrey Shaver...360-414-5592

**Food Program Staff**  
Vicki Washington...360-414-5591  
Jesse Smith.....360-414-5598  
Ruby Stilson.....360-414-5596  
Antonio Trejo.....360-414-5577

**Environmental Health Secretary**  
Melissa Letos ... 360-414-5583

**Health Department Main Line**  
360-414-5599



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### IMMINENT HEALTH HAZARDS

Imminent Health Hazard means a significant threat or danger to health that is considered to exist when there is evidence sufficient to show that a product, practice, circumstances, or event creates a situation that requires immediate correction and cessation of operation to prevent injury based on:

- Power outages: causing improper temperature control
- No water: preventing adequate hand washing, equipment cleaning
- Emergency situations: flooding, accident, fire, or building collapse
- Sewage backup or sewage contamination within the establishment
- An occurrence of a possible outbreak of foodborne illness

When the situation has been corrected and the facility is deemed safe then the regulatory authority will issue approval to resume operations.

For more information refer to either the Health Departments web site, The *Washington State Retail Food Code Working Document* or call and one of the Food Program Staff members will help you with your questions.

## TOP 3 ROUTINE INSPECTION VIOLATIONS

The following are the top 3 Red Critical violations on routine inspections for the year 2010. They are as follows:

### 1. FOOD WORKER CARDS

Food workers must have a current Washington State Food and Beverage Workers card (i.e. health cards) before their first day of work.

The only exception to this requirement is if the owner has a training procedure in place for new hires, documents when training took place and can produce that documentation for the Health Inspector when asked – then the employee has 14 days from start date to obtain a food worker card.

Tips for compliance:

- Assign a person to manage the Food Worker Cards
- Post names with dates of upcoming expired cards
- Routinely check for expiration dates
- Have a policy in place for handling employees with expired cards
- Cards renewed before expiring will be given a 3 or 5 year card depending on additional training

### 2. IMPROPER HOT HOLDING

Since cooking does not kill all bacteria, cooked potentially hazardous food must be kept hot until served. This way the surviving bacteria will not grow back again. Hot food must be kept at 140°F or higher.

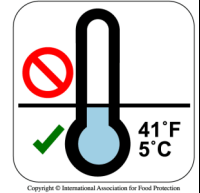
Tips for compliance:

- Preheat all hot holding equipment
- Use a thermometer to check temperatures often to ensure 140°F or higher
- Use lids
- Stir food often for a consistent temperature
- Never mix cold foods with cooked foods
- Post Signs to remind employees
- Keep equipment in good repair and clean



### 3. IMPROPER COLD HOLDING

Remember bacteria grow quickly when food is in the Danger Zone. Keep cold foods cold in the refrigerator, in ice, or other approved method to keep bacteria from growing. Cold food must be kept at 41°F or colder.



Tips for compliance:

- Check temperatures to ensure 41°F or lower
- When using ice to keep food cold, ice must surround the container to the top level of the food.
- Pre-chill ingredients before making a cold salad
- Provide a thermometer in each cooler
- Post Signs to remind employees

## HEALTH DEPARTMENT AFTER HOURS INFO

There may be events that make it necessary to contact the Health Department outside of normal office hours. Some of those include a report of a possible foodborne illness, loss of hot water or complete loss of water, loss of electricity, as well as several other imminent health hazards. Due to the need to respond to these issues immediately, you may find it useful to know how to notify the Health Department.

Please do not call your inspectors office phone and leave a message regarding off hours emergencies.

Instructions for emergency contacts are available by dialing the main Health Department phone line 360-414-5599. The answering service will contact Health Department on-call personnel for needed assistance.



## **COWLITZ COUNTY FOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS WANTED**

BY: COWLITZ COUNTY FOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Cowlitz County Food Advisory Committee is now accepting applications for 2011 membership. Created in 1998, the purpose of this committee is to promote and protect the health and safety of the public, prevent the spread of disease by food, and advise the Cowlitz County Board of Health on matters pertaining to developing and sustaining a pro-active food advisory committee.

The Food Advisory Committee meets 4 times a year and is currently comprised of members from the restaurant and grocery industry, academia, the Cowlitz County Health Department, and consumer stakeholders.

As a food permit holder in Cowlitz County, you have an important voice. Your participation is welcome and encouraged!

Please call Melissa Letos at 360-414-5583 for information on upcoming meeting dates and times.

Or visit the website: <http://www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/health/environmentalhealth/food/food.htm>

For application:

[http://www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/commissioners/commission\\_boards/Boards%20&%20Commissioners.htm](http://www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/commissioners/commission_boards/Boards%20&%20Commissioners.htm)

## **FOODSERVICE ESTABLISHMENTS ON SEPTIC SYSTEMS REQUIRED TO SUBMIT INSPECTION REPORTS IN 2011**

BY CHRIS BISCHOFF

In an attempt to comply with existing State and County rules the Environmental Health Unit (EHU) of the Building and Planning Department is beginning enforcement this year of existing rules for food service establishments that use septic systems. The legal requirement is for any food service establishment utilizing a septic system to submit an Operations and Maintenance (O&M) inspection form annually to the EHU. The inspection must be performed by a professional provider licensed by the EHU. The EHU has sent out two notices to restaurants already, and will be sending out an additional reminder later this year. Every food service establishment that is served by a septic system must submit a report to the EHU by December 31, 2011.

The purpose of these inspections is to ensure that failing septic systems are not endangering public health, this is especially important at foodservice facilities. This inspection and report will be required to be submitted annually to the EHU. Facilities that do not comply may be cited and/or have their food permit withheld. There is a list of O&M professionals on the County web site at: [http://www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/buildplan/enviro\\_health/O&M\\_Provider\\_List.html](http://www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/buildplan/enviro_health/O&M_Provider_List.html)

For more information contact Chris Bischoff at Cowlitz County Building and Planning 360-577-3052 or [bischoffc@co.cowlitz.wa.us](mailto:bischoffc@co.cowlitz.wa.us)

## **CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL ESTIMATES - BURDEN OF FOODBORNE DISEASE IN US**

CDC now estimates that each year roughly:

- ◆ 48 million people get sick (1 out of 6 Americans);
- ◆ 128,000 are hospitalized; and
- ◆ 3,000 people die from foodborne diseases.

For access the reports/papers and more information, go to: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/eid/index.htm> and [www.cdc.gov/foodborneburden](http://www.cdc.gov/foodborneburden)

## HOW TO HANDLE A REPORTED FOODBORNE ILLNESS

By Larry French, Washington State Department of Health

Originally published in the Washington Restaurant Association's Monthly Magazine, "The Front Burner"

It's one of those events that you only wish on your worst enemy. Yes, I am talking about the dreaded customer call, reporting a foodborne illness that they believe came from your food or beverage. So what should you do next? What are you required to do? And what else should you consider? I will try to shed some light on these questions.

For many managers and owners, the initial thought is to ignore the call and move on with business. But there are many factors that come in to play and cannot be disregarded.

### When you get the Call

First, you obviously are not in business to make your customers ill (or as one food safety trainer states "It is not OK to kill your customers"), and you probably want this customer to return in the future. So you have the PR angle to work out. This is not the food safety side, but is probably still a concern for you.

Secondly, while you have them on the phone, get as much information from them as possible. Let them know you plan on sharing this with your local health department (your obligation by state law).

### Collect the following information from the caller:

- Time and date they were in your establishment
- Who ate/drank (names, ages, phone number)
- Who ordered what
- Who became ill and who did not
- Who saw a doctor/visited the ER
- Whether there are any leftovers

If the customer is uncomfortable giving any of this information to you, refer them to your local health jurisdiction.

Follow up quickly with your other key managers and persons in charge, asking if they've heard of similar calls. It is very important to know if this is an isolated call.

### Alert the Health Department

Finally, contact your local health jurisdiction as soon as possible and share the information. They will advise you on what to do next and may determine that a visit to your establishment is necessary.

For the implicated foods, ask the health inspector if

you should separate, label and/or freeze these as samples for possible lab testing. Discarding such implicated foods may work against you, as these foods may not have been involved and would test negative for pathogens of concern.

### Gather Documentation

Sort through the receipts of these same implicated foods and have those ready for your call to the inspector as well. With the frequency of local and national recalls, some products you use may have come into your facility contaminated. The invoices help with traceback.

Look at your staffing over the past two weeks. Have you had any staff call in ill or go home early? What were their symptoms? Did anyone need to see a doctor? This is not the time to "overlook" such information. Your inspector can help you effectively determine if you have the details.

Have you had any equipment breakdowns, power outages, drain backups, overhead leaks or water stoppages? Does your staff recall if there were any issues with vendors (meat delivered warm, damaged delivery containers, ill deliveryman).

Any one of these factors could impact your food safety program and result in a foodborne illness. **Remember:** two or more reports of illness (customer or staff) from consumption of a certain food or beverage qualifies as an outbreak.

Outbreaks often times are caused by more than just one factor. You need to act quickly to prevent the spread of this problem, and immediately notify your local food safety inspector. This will help to identify the problems and minimize the impact to your customers and the resulting litigation potential. Make sure you have the contact and off hours contact numbers for your local health jurisdiction, and post them where your key staff can locate them.

It may seem frightening initially, but following these steps can save you and your business considerable headaches and expense in the long-run.

Larry French is a food safety advisor in the Office of Environmental Health, Safety & Toxicology with the Washington State Department of Health.