Food for thought

Winter 2024

A newsletter for Fairfax County food establishment owners and operators and their employees

Holiday Catering – It's the Season

During the holiday season an establishment's catering events can increase and with it, so can the volume of food produced. Increased food production has the potential to hinder safe food preparation. Cooking, cooling and reheating have temperature and/or time parameters that can be neglected if food staff are in a hurry. Before accepting major catering events, there are a few items every facility should verify that they have:

1. **Kitchen Equipment.** Kitchen equipment should be adequate to prepare foods for events. Adequate refrigeration space is needed, not only for added inventory, but also for shallow pans and other containers used to cool various food items. Verify there is adequate capacity to reheat foods and to safely hot hold the food after reheating and prior to service,
2. **Trained staff.** Staff are the first line of defense against pathogens when they are properly trained on food handling and processing.
3. **Calibrated thermometers.** Fully functional thermometers will allow for adequate temperature monitoring throughout each food process.

Food preparation in advance adds major food safety concerns, particularly when it involves cooking and cooling processes. Hot foods must be quickly cooled from 135°F to 70°F in two hours or less and from 135°f to 41°F in no more than a total of 6 hours using sheet pans, shallow hotel pans (2" deep or less), ice baths, ice wands or other approved processes. Foods cooked in advance and cooled must be reheated to 165°F for hot holding. Use a calibrated food thermometer to verify that the temperature has reached 165°F. Use food temperature logs to monitor and record food and equipment temperatures. Use approved hot and cold holding containers to transport foods to offsite catered events.

Sometimes temporary staff need to be brought in to help an establishment manage catered events. This can include wait staff, bartenders, kitchen staff and others. Be sure to review employee health policies with these staff. Keeping ill employees away from food and maintaining safe practices throughout food preparation will help keep everyone safe and happy this holiday season. ■

Stamp of Approval

Fairfax County's Health Department strives to protect, promote and improve health and quality of life for all who live in our community. One way that the Consumer Protection Program aims to achieve this goal is through the STAMP program, Safety Through Actively Managing Practices! The STAMP program is an active managerial control (AMC) voluntary program whose participants exhibit exceptional practices and procedures that reduce the risk of foodborne illness within the establishment. Some requirements of the program are a history of at least three routine inspections or risk factor assessments conducted, a maximum total of two critical violations and a total of six non-critical violations within the past three inspections conducted. These facilities implement food safety training for all employees and have established standard operating procedures. The facility that gets our "STAMP of approval" this season is **Chick-fil-A Chantilly, 4201 Chantilly Shopping Center**. Congratulations on your enrollment and continued efforts to promote food safety!!

JOB WELL DONE! Active Managerial Control Awardees Recognized:

As the year comes to a close, we would like to congratulate the food service operators who have been recognized with the Active Managerial Control award! During their recent inspections, there were no violations cited, and it was observed that good active managerial controls were in place at their establishments.

Congratulations to:

- Norbert Roesch, The Residence at Colvin Run, 1131 Walker Rd, Great Falls, VA
- Samuel Pekich and Ashley Martinez, Chick-Fil A, 4201 Chantilly Shopping Center Dr, Chantilly, VA

See pictures and read details about how they are reducing the risk of foodborne illness in their food establishment on the Health Department website: www.bit.ly/AMC-Awardees

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Keeping "PESTY" Diners Out

Dealing with unwelcome guests is never fun. Whether it is cockroaches and rodents in the back of house, in your food storage areas, or flies in the front dining area, pests within a restaurant and retail food setting are a major problem. They can not only destroy valuable inventory but can possibly lead to the introduction of diseases and cause serious damage to your business.

Along with a professional pest management program in place, you can work with your employees to make sure the basics are being covered on a daily basis.

- **Entrances and exits:** Eliminating entry points for pests will help keep them out of your establishment. Doors and windows should be kept closed when possible. For certain spaces like receiving areas that are going to be opened frequently or for extended periods, consider installing an air curtain. Doors can also benefit from door screens and a door sweep, which seals gaps between the bottom of the door and the floor for added protection. Seal any cracks and crevices around the building that pests may use to sneak inside.
- **Inspect shipments:** Pests will often hitch a ride into your kitchen via your supplies and shipment boxes. Before you let any incoming shipments into your restaurant, be sure to inspect it carefully. If signs of pest activity are present keep the box far away from your facility and contact the vendor.
- **Proper food storage:** Make sure to store and stack food packages and containers appropriately. Keep items away from the floors and inspect stored food regularly to catch signs of pests early.
- **Practice FIFO:** A first in, first out strategy, or FIFO, can help prevent pest infestations. FIFO minimizes the amount of time food stays in storage. Date the food items, and always take the oldest out first before it expires or grows more susceptible to infestation.
- **Make sure you have routine cleaning policies in place.** Remember, all it takes is a small amount of food debris or biological residue on your floors, counters or in your drains to attract pests. Regular cleaning policies are important for keeping your restaurant clean. Your daily cleaning routine should include:
  - **Sweep and mop floors.** Traces of food left on floors and tables is a magnet for pests. Sweep and mop daily to get rid of any residue.
  - **Disinfect counters and all kitchen items.** Clean and disinfect all kitchen counters, as well as items used in food preparation, including cutting boards, blenders, grills, stoves, fryers, etc.
  - **Clean and maintain drains.** Pests, particularly flies, are often attracted to the organic matter that gets trapped in drains in restaurant sinks and floors. Make sure these drains are cleaned at least once a day. A drain trap will ensure that organic waste doesn't get trapped in the pipes.
  - **Line all trash cans and regularly remove waste.** All trash cans inside your restaurant should always be lined and kept covered. Trash should be emptied regularly, typically several times a day.
  - **Dumpsters should be kept at least 15 feet away from the building.** Empty the dumpsters, power wash them and the ground around them on a regular basis, and ensure all lids and doors are kept closed.

Pests are always on the hunt for food, water, and shelter so denying them all those necessities will deter them from entering and staying in your restaurant.

Permit Renewals Are Due

All Food Establishment Permits expire on December 31, 2024. Renewal notices will be sent via PLUS to the applicant and owner from October through December. There is no grace period. A $10 late fee applies starting January 1, 2025, and establishments may not operate without a valid permit after that date. Ensure correct email addresses are included on the renewal forms. For questions, contact the Health Department at hdehd@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Let the Health Department Know

If there has been a recent change of ownership, additions of new equipment, major changes in the menu, or an establishment name change, the Health Department must be notified in advance and appropriate application forms must be submitted in the PLUS system. All new equipment must be approved by the Health Department representative before installation and sometimes permits must be pulled from other agencies before installation. For more information, please contact the Health Department at hdehd@fairfaxcounty.gov or visit our webpage at www.bit.ly/3Cruvuz.

Lead by Example

When it comes to food safety practices, food service employees learn best from the example set by the Person-In-Charge (PIC). Here are some examples of typical practices the PIC can demonstrate to his or her workers:

- Wash hands frequently and correctly.
- Do not allow bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods.
- Monitor safe food product temperatures with a thermometer.
- Promptly refrigerate meats, poultry, dairy and egg products when delivered. Rapidly cool potentially hazardous food.
- Practice efficient date marking.
- Demonstrate the proper use of the 3-vat sink: wash, rinse and sanitize, and air dry.
- Use sanitizer test strips every day.
- Positively reinforce safe food handling techniques.

SURVEY: WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

We want to help improve your experience with the Health Department. Help make that happen by taking a few moments to give us your feedback by filling out our quick survey at the link below. Thank you for a great 2024 and cheers to the upcoming New Year!

www.bit.ly/4eyqdip