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**T**his issue of Food Matters addresses:

- Food Defense Strategies
- Food Allergies
- Staying Safe and Healthy at Work
- Reduced Oxygen Packaging

**FOOD DEFENSE STRATEGIES**

A SELF ASSESSMENT GUIDE FOR FOOD SERVICE OPERATORS

**T**he Department of Homeland Security and other government agencies have identified the food industry as a potential terrorist “target” for the spread of biological or chemical agents. Thousands of people each day use retail food establishments for snacks, beverages and full meals. As a retail food establishment operator, you can take several steps to increase food safety and security in your establishment. One such practice is to perform a self-assessment of your food operations. Self-assessment is a powerful management tool that

allows you not just to improve security and safety but also general work practices.

**How to do a self-assessment?**

There are two basic steps to self-assessment:

- ◆ Document your operation. Write down what you do and how you do it. Get your employees involved by asking them to describe how they perform their tasks.
- ◆ Get help if you need it. Consult experts: vendors, health department, police etc., for advice on your specific safety and security issues.

**Major concerns**

*Unrestricted access to your facility:* Restrict customers to public areas and limit facility access to employees and contractors only.

*Untrained or poorly trained employees:* Train employees to recognize potential food safety and security risks and to report them to the person in charge. Likewise, train the person in charge to know what to do in case an incident occurs. Do

Continued on Page 2



## FOOD ALLERGIES CAN BE LIFE THREATENING

MAKE SURE YOUR PATRONS KNOW WHAT'S IN THEIR FOOD

**F**ood allergies occur when the immune system overreacts to certain proteins found in a food. The result: symptoms like tingling in the mouth, vomiting, hives, skin rash, and wheezing. For most, symptoms are temporary and not life-threatening. But for a small number of allergic individuals, eating the wrong food may lead to a potentially life-threatening anaphylactic reaction, including swelling of the throat, difficulty breathing and cardiovascular collapse (shock).

Avoidance is the best way to prevent an allergic reaction to food. Most allergy sufferers know what they cannot eat but need to know the ingredients in foods so they can avoid a reaction. Since most food allergy deaths occur when people eat outside the home, it is extremely important for food service establishments to have ingredient information readily available.

About 8% of children and 2% of adults have food allergies. Peanuts, tree nuts (like walnuts, pecans, and almonds), shellfish, fish, eggs, milk, soybeans, and wheat are responsible for 90% of all food allergies. Anaphylactic reactions from food allergy affect about 30,000 Americans each year and can be deadly. Foods that cause an allergic response may be hard to recognize in a meal. For example, oils used to prepare foods such as peanut oil can cause a reaction, and anchovies, often

found in Caesar salad dressing, can trigger a fish allergy. The presence of even a small amount of an offending food is dangerous for very sensitive individuals. For them, eating an apparently “safe” food that was prepared using the same equipment or utensils as an allergenic food can lead to a reaction.

### How to protect your patrons:

- ◆ Educate staff about the common sources of food allergy: peanuts, tree nuts (like walnuts, pecans, almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, chestnuts, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, pine nuts, and pistachios), shellfish, fish, eggs, milk, soybeans, and wheat.

- ◆ Include allergenic ingredients in the name or description of menu items, for example “Beef in peanut sauce” or “Chocolate cake with hazelnut cream filling”. Avoid using ingredients that are not obvious and can cause food allergies.

- ◆ Train staff to listen carefully when a customer reports a food allergy. Encourage servers to ask what specific foods the customer cannot eat.

- ◆ Ensure servers can describe a menu item and its ingredients upon request. Recommend that guests order another item if there is uncertainty about whether a menu item contains the offending food.

- ◆ Train chefs to prepare allergen-free versions of items

upon request. Prepare these items simply, leaving sauces, dressings, and garnishes on the side.

- ◆ Read labels carefully, as many prepared products contain hidden allergens.

### What to do if someone has an allergic reaction

Call 911 if a customer experiences swelling of the

mouth and throat, has difficulty breathing or is in distress. Post the name, street address and telephone number of your establishment beside each telephone so the caller can quickly provide this information to 911. Ask the patron or accompanying family if they carry allergy medication and, if so, suggest they use it immediately.

## FOOD DEFENSE STRATEGIES

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employee background checks and verify information given.

### *Contaminated food products:*

Know the people who deliver food supplies and what they deliver. Ask questions and only receive food products after a thorough inspection. Secure all products and store food and non-food items, especially dangerous chemicals, separately.

### *Improper food preparation*

*practices:* Develop a routine for all tasks. When food is prepared the same way every time, it is easier to detect irregularities. Examine all ingredients before using them. Never use food that has an unfamiliar or unusual look or smell.

### *Secure customer service area:*

A controlled customer service area will prevent product tampering. Place self-service stations like salad bars and buffets where staff can watch them. Be wary

of anyone lingering at the self-service areas for too long, or of anyone who seems overly interested in your operations.

### *Improper cleaning practices:*

Cleaning agents can also be used to contaminate food and food areas. It is important to keep all cleaning supplies in secure areas. Always follow instructions printed on the labels and never mix two cleaning agents together.

This document is adapted from “Food Defense Strategies” issued by the New York State Health Department. This document is available online at: [http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/food/docs/food\\_defense\\_strategies.pdf](http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/food/docs/food_defense_strategies.pdf) or by typing “food defense strategies” in the search box at: [www.health.state.ny.us](http://www.health.state.ny.us)

You may also obtain a copy from the New York City Health Academy, which is located at 160 West 100 Street, NY, NY 10025.

## REDUCED OXYGEN PACKAGING

Reduced Oxygen Packaging methods of food preparation (e.g. *sous vide*) are gaining interest among restaurants in New York City. There is serious health risk associated with this if it is done improperly. For this reason, the Department of Health and Mental

Hygiene is designing regulations to control this process. Anyone interested in this method of food preparation must first contact the Bureau of Food Safety and Community Sanitation at 212-676-1600.



## STAYING SAFE AND HEALTHY AT WORK

As of April 2006, all food workers enrolled in the Food Protection course receive training on workplace health and safety. The training focuses on recognizing hazards in restaurants, and provides low-cost, easy-to-use solutions.

Similar training will be incorporated into the on-line course. Educational materials in English, Spanish, and Chinese will be available later this year to help managers train food service staff.



*Tripping Hazard*

## HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW?



September is National Food Safety Education Month. This year's theme is "Don't Compromise, Clean and Sanitize." The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene encourages you to always remember to keep your food contact surfaces and

### Are you a food safety guru?

#### Don't Compromise: Clean and Sanitize!

- To sanitize food contact surfaces means:
  - A removing soil from a surface
  - B removing food from a surface
  - C reducing the number of microorganisms to safe levels
  - D eliminating all microorganisms from a soiled surface
- The same utensil or cutting surface must never be used for both raw and ready-to-eat food without first sanitizing it.
  - A True
  - B False
- Hands should be washed:
  - A With warm soapy water for 20 seconds
  - B With cold running water for 20 seconds
  - C Before and after preparing raw meat and shellfish
  - D A and C only
- Which of the following help prevent cross-contamination:
  - A Clean and sanitize before you begin working with another type of food
  - B Removing garbage from food preparation areas as soon as possible
  - C Washing hands thoroughly with warm soapy water after using the restroom
  - D A and C only
- What strength of chlorine sanitizer is used to sanitize dishes?
  - A 50 ppm
  - B 40 ppm
  - C 30 ppm
  - D 20 ppm
- The correct temperature for sanitizing dishes with hot water is:
  - A 100° F
  - B 120° F
  - C 140° F
  - D 170° F

Answers to How Much Do You Know:

1. C; 2. A; 3. D; 4. D; 5. A; 6. D



## ON-LINE FOOD PROTECTION COURSE

The Food Protection Course is now offered online in English. This course is designed with your busy schedule in mind; there is no time limit for its completion. You can study at your own pace, whenever and wherever

you want. The course is divided into 15 sections; each section will take you approximately one hour to finish. At the end of each section, there is a short quiz. You have to answer all questions in this quiz correctly before you are permitted to

move to the next section. After you have successfully completed all 15 sections, you will then be allowed to select an examination date. The final examination will be administered at the Health Academy at 160 West 100 Street on the date and time you have selected. Upon successful completion of the final examination, your Food Protection Certificate will be sent to you by mail within two weeks. Use the following web address to connect to the Food Protection Course <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/hany/hanyfood-online.shtml> or by typing "online food protection course" in the search box at: [www.nyc.gov/health](http://www.nyc.gov/health)



## SHELLFISH ALERT

Restaurants are reminded to observe the following safety guidelines when purchasing, storing, preparing, and serving shellfish:

Save all tags and invoices that are attached to the shellfish for 90 days.

- ◆ All shellfish should be maintained at a temperature of 41°F or below.
- ◆ Keep raw seafood and their juices away from other foods.
- ◆ Live shellfish must be kept alive until time of preparation. Throw out any shellfish that have died during storage.
- ◆ Inform the Health Department immediately if patrons or staff report illness after eating shellfish.

NYC DEPT. OF HEALTH & MENTAL HYGIENE  
HEALTH ACADEMY  
160 WEST 100 STREET, RM. 109  
NEW YORK, NY 10025

If you have questions or comments regarding this newsletter, please call the Health Academy. Important telephone numbers are listed below.

### General Information ☎ 311

#### ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNAL

66 John Street, 11th floor,  
NY, NY 10038

☎ (212) 361-1000

#### BUREAU OF FOOD SAFETY & COMMUNITY SANITATION

253 Broadway, 12th floor,  
Box CN59A, NY, NY 10007

☎ (212) 676-1600

#### CITYWIDE LICENSING CENTER

42 Broadway, 5th floor,  
NY, NY 10004

☎ (212) 487-4436

#### HEALTH ACADEMY

160 West 100th Street,  
NY, NY 10025

☎ (212) 280-9211

#### INSPECTOR GENERAL

80 Maiden Lane,  
NY, NY 10005

☎ (212) 825-2141

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