

## **TALKING POINTS ON INTERNET/PUBLIC POSTINGS OF RESTAURANT HEALTH INSPECTION RESULTS/GRADES**

Food safety is non-negotiable, and a priority issue to the restaurant-and-foodservice industry. The industry is committed to professionalism.

The industry certainly does not condone restaurants that violate good sanitation procedures or health codes. However, snap-shot, isolated inspection examples (like grades posted in the window) do not present a picture of the entire industry. It is important to educate the public about what grades mean before requiring restaurants to post them publicly.

A health department inspection sheet, while a matter of public record, is really a working document that is provided by the health department and is not designed to serve as a guide post to the general consumer as to the quality or purity of the food served in restaurants.

The fact that a restaurant is open for business indicated that no health hazard exists at that establishment. If an eating place poses a risk to human health, it is closed on the spot.

A health inspection report records items that, in many cases, are fixed during the inspection. Structural issues entirely unrelated to food safety may result in a low score. Since the next inspection will occur months later, the report will not reflect the current conditions in the restaurant.

Any public postings of health inspection results should be accurate, objective, timely, comparable to previous inspections, easy to understand for laypersons, and indicative of food safety only.

All inspection violations listed publicly should be directly related to food safety, such as holding temperatures of food items—non-food safety violations, such as cracked floor tiles, do not pose a threat to public health, and can be misleading. If non-food safety violations are to be listed, they should be clearly identified as such.

Rating systems should be modified to not mislead the public about potential health hazards. For example, critical food safety violations should be corrected immediately or the facility should be closed, while violations not related to food safety do not endanger public health. A “pass or fail or closed” grade system of publicly posting inspection results, rather than a number or letter grade system, is the most accurate way of informing the public of the status of an individual foodservice establishment.

A full description and significance of any food safety violations (i.e. grades) should accompany public listings to avoid misinterpretation and inaccuracy.

Food safety violations that have been corrected by the foodservice establishment should be acknowledged immediately to let the public know there is no continuing problem.

Violations and inspection reports challenged by the foodservice establishment should be listed as such to avoid conveying subjective, inaccurate or unfounded information.

As the creation and maintenance of a Web site can be costly and time-consuming, health departments need to ensure that enough funds and personnel are available to maintain accurate and up-to-date information on the site without reducing the number or quality of health inspections before launching an Internet posting program.

Foodservice establishments should be allowed to quickly appeal inaccurate information that is publicly posted and have it removed in a timely manor. Damages caused by the posting of inaccurate information should be compensated by the health department, which must also assume full legal responsibility for the accuracy of the information it publishes.

Standardization of the certification of individual health inspectors should be established to guarantee objective and accurate inspection results, and the accuracy of any public listings of those results.

Health inspections should be performed at consistent frequency at all foodservice establishments to ensure fairness and accuracy. Public listings should be updated with the same consistency.

Scales of inspection ratings should be established to accommodate variance in size and complexity of the foodservice establishment. For example, coffee shops, school cafeterias and fine dining restaurants vary not only in operations, but also by food items served (and number thereof), required certification of staff, food preparation and cooking methods, serving tools used, etc.

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All establishments in the area should be inspected on the same regular frequency to assure that the public gets an update accurate and consistent view of all establishments.