

# Restaurant citations don't lead to fines

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In Oakland County, inspections that lead to citations against restaurant owners for improper food handling or sanitation don't come with any cash penalties.

"That's just not how Oakland County's process is," said Larry Harris, supervisor of the Oakland County Environmental Health Unit. "Basically, we are out for education and protecting the public health. We can revoke

a license after certain processes and when they get themselves back into compliance, they're issued another license."

If there is a critical violation that can't be corrected at the time of violation, that automatically requires a follow-up inspection.

He explained that a critical violation has public health significance in terms of a potential for a problem to occur. A non-critical violation might be something like a broken ceiling tile, a dirty area or a dirty piece of equipment.

About 95 percent of critical violations can be corrected because they are practices, like chemical or food storage, he said.

"There's a bazillion items out there in terms of non-criticals," Harris said. "The criticals are gloves, date labeling, the proper handling of food in terms of temperature control and proper refrigeration."

He could only speculate at this time how the chicken salad delivered to the Farmington Training Center could have been contaminated.

"It could have been bare-hand-

ed contact," Harris said. "It could have been cross-contamination from a prior food processing or the work surface wasn't sanitized. A cutting board needs to be sanitized. It's the old story at Thanksgiving, the raw turkey on the cutting board. You have to sanitize the cutting board and the counters before you start."

Harris further explained that employees need to wear gloves with ready-to-eat foods. Raw chicken that will be cooked and processed can be handled with bare hands.

"A cooking process will kill off

bacteria," Harris said. "I have seen short order cooks making hamburgers who make using tongs look like art work. They don't use gloves, they use tongs and never touch it (the food). They use tongs and a spatula."

Coleslaw, salads, carrots sticks are considered ready-to-eat foods and require gloved handling. Putting a label on chicken salad with the date it was made is also necessary, Harris said. Basically at 41 degrees, chicken salad can be kept for up to seven days; at 45 degrees, for four days.

# Illness

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were cited one time previously for not wearing gloves during an Oct. 22, 2001 inspection, according to a file made available to the Observer under the Freedom of Information Act.

"The symptoms, of nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, headache, diarrhea and low-grade fever, agree with the assessment as to the incubation period (mean of 33 hours) and duration of symptoms (mean of 28 hours)," Maxfield wrote. "Based upon statistical analysis, the chicken salad sandwich was the vehicle of transmission. A specific agent may be identified by laboratory testing."

**Reported in March**

The school district reported incidents of illness to the Oakland County Health Department March 13. "I appreciated them getting on this as quickly as they did," Maxfield said Monday.

Twenty-six of 38 people interviewed reported being ill. "Nineteen of the 26 who were ill reported having eaten the chicken salad sandwich," Maxfield said. "The size of the sample used by the health department is larger than that needed to achieve statistically significant results."

The restaurant was ordered to follow a series of recommendations to minimize the possibility of future incidents of this sort, Maxfield said.

Jeff Wasser reiterated the couple's criticism about the lack of refrigeration at the Farmington Training Center when the food was delivered.

**Temperature abuse**

He said he delivered the food at 10:45 a.m. and noticed that everyone still wasn't present for lunch. Students who shadowed staff and administrators were served upon arrival, which was somewhat staggered. By 12:15 p.m., most of the participants ate lunch, according to Maxfield, who didn't consider refrigeration an issue. He said that the food was actually delivered later, about 11:05 a.m.

"This was time temperature abuse," Wasser said. "If you look at all the cleanest restaurants in Oakland County, our reports have been extremely good."

The food was prepared the morning of the event. Typically, when food is delivered, people eat it instantaneously, Wasser said. This wasn't done in this case and some of the leftover chicken salad sandwiches were taken home or eaten later, he said.

The restaurant has served food to the metropolitan Detroit area. "We fed Kid Rock," Wasser said.

Larry Harris, supervisor at the Oakland County Health Department's South Oakland office and process evaluator is clear about what was contaminated. "It was definitely the chicken."

"We will be following up," Harris said. "There will be some requirements to take a food class if they haven't already."

**Testing**

Cultures go to the state laboratory in Lansing. Results should be available in about two weeks.

Vehicles of transmission can be bacterial, viral, chemical or toxin. "Dr. (Carolyn) Bird has determined this is viral gastroenteritis," Harris said.

Bird, chief of medical services for the Oakland County Epidemiology Unit, Harris, and Corrine Serrell, a public health nurse, presented the food-borne illness report March 21 to Maxfield and Cheryl Cannon, assistant superintendent of business, finance and operations.

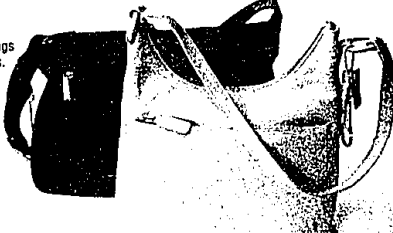
The business was also cited March 13 for no hand towels at the sink and for the dishwasher not sanitizing properly. Jeff Wasser said he pointed out to the sanitation that the coil wasn't turned on when she checked it.

While citations can lead to negative publicity, Harris said the health department's goal is not to browbeat the business owner when an incident occurs.

"With something like this, there's not intent," Harris said. "Things just got a little sloppy. We don't mean to be punitive. We just need to get this food establishment back on board with proper food handling practices. This is a real learning experience for them, I bet. We will be very graphic in their face, that two times they were caught without having gloves on."



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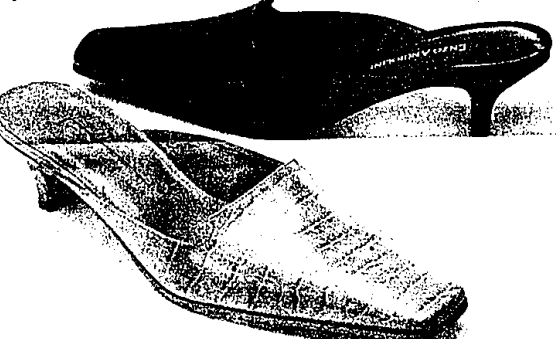
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