Food Inspector Training: Washington State Retail Food Code

In October, our state surveyors/inspectors were trained on the Washington State Retail Food Code. This article summarizes this training and how it will affect our LeadingAge Washington members.

The day started with a refresher on Applied Food Microbiology. The types of pathogens of greatest concern are spore-forming bacteria (Clostridium botulinum and perfringens, and Bacillus cereus), viruses (Hepatitis A and Norovirus), and non spore-forming bacteria (Salmonella subtype, Campylobacter, E.Coli O157:H7, staphylococcus aureus, Listeria monocytogenes, Vibrio parahaemolyticus and Shigella spp.) With each of these, attendees learned incubation period, the duration, the symptoms a person might exhibit and how to kill these pathogenic microorganisms.

The Washington State Retail Food Code, Chapter 246-215 of the WAC effective May 1, 2013 was reviewed. Attendees practiced looking identified issues in the Food Code.

Food safety equipment was presented that included the use of inspection equipment like identification of the inspector, wearing protective clothing and head coverings. Also reviewed was a form called the red/blue form that addresses the top reasons people get food-borne illnesses. The most revealing part of this section was the inspection equipment the surveyors/inspectors will be using. Instead of the thermometers with the gauges on them, they will all be using Comark Instrument PDT300 Digital Pocket Thermometers. These cost about $32.00 but can be purchased on Amazon for $19.50. You need to be able to temp the smallest piece of food you serve. This instrument will allow you to do that. They will not pay much attention to the thermometers in your refrigerators, but they will test the temp of the actual food being stored there. Cold foods need to be stored at 41 degrees or cooler, hot foods above 135 degrees. If food temps in the danger zone, then you can expect the surveyor/inspector to look into your processes to manage foods at the correct temps.

Risk based processes were also addressed. The top 10 risk factors in Washington were identified. They are as follows:

1. Ill food workers
2. Hand washing
3. Bare hand contact
4. Cooling
5. Cross contamination
6. Hot holding
7. Cold holding
8. Reheating
9. Cooking
10. Fruit & vegetables

Foods are divided into 3 categories of food preparation:

1. Process 1 – No cooking and no cooling involved
2. Process 2 – Cooking but no cooling is involved
3. Process 3 – Cooking and cooling is involved and maybe reheating.
Kitchen inspections will focus mostly on foods in Process 2 & 3 categories of food preparation.

The day ended with a presentation on changing behavior through enforcement. It is important that your kitchen managers understand and have processes in place to manage the top 10 risk factors. One question they may be asked is how do you handle a worker who is sick with vomiting and diarrhea? No one can be in the kitchen with those symptoms is the right answer.

How might this affect you? Your surveyors/inspectors will begin to focus on the top 10 reasons why our residents get food-borne illness in Washington State. Review and revise as needed all your process and policies around those top 10 risk areas. Make sure managers and staff understand what they are doing and why so they can articulate your processes to surveyors/inspectors. A lot of the tasks the inspectors do now, will not be done unless they see something that sends up an alarm.

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