



AVOID A HEALTH INSPECTION HEADLINE: *Pest Management Tips to Pass a Health Inspection with Flying Colors*

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If you follow the local news, inevitably you have seen a headline like the following, which can be the ultimate failure for any respectable restaurant:

LOCAL RESTAURANT CLOSED DUE TO FAILED HEALTH INSPECTION

While the fine print usually reveals that the restaurant will reopen after improvements are made, the damage is done. If the inspection doesn't result in a shutdown, a bad score is more visible than ever. County health departments often post inspection scores online, so your latest inspection score (and the specific reasons for any deductions) are now just a Google search away from potential customers.

Given the high stakes, it's imperative that restaurateurs prepare for unannounced health inspections since they can happen at any time.

HOW PESTS FACTOR INTO THE HEALTH INSPECTION HEADLINE

The main purpose of a health inspection is food safety. Since rodents, flies, cockroaches and other pests can contaminate food and food preparation surfaces, any evidence of vermin or insects inside a restaurant – or conditions that might lead to infestation – can cause point deductions. If an active infestation is discovered, the health inspector can shut down the establishment immediately and keep it closed until the problem is resolved.

To prepare for an unannounced visit from the health inspector, consider performing your own inspections on a regular basis. These reviews should focus on four common pest “hot spots.”

HOT SPOT #1: LOADING DOCKS

Pests look for easy ways to access your restaurant, so receiving areas with open doors are prone to issues. Cockroaches, in particular, are known as “hitchhiking” pests and can get a free ride into your restaurant by latching onto shipments. Take the necessary steps to pest-proof your restaurant from the outside in.

- **Deter entry.** Install plastic strip curtains on doors near loading dock areas. High traffic from regular supply and food shipments causes doors to remain open for long periods of time – an easy way for pests to get inside. Replace fluorescent lights near front and back entrances with sodium vapor lights, which are less attractive to flies. This can

help keep flying pests from accessing your restaurant when patrons enter and exit or when employees take breaks or dispose of trash in the back.

- **Inspect supplies before storing.** Monitor boxes for signs of pests such as gnaw marks, droppings, or live and/or dead pests. Use black lights to help spot rodent urine.
- **Toss the cardboard.** Remove shipments from their original cardboard boxes. Pests can use boxes for harborage inside your restaurant. Cockroaches can even feed on the glue that holds boxes together.

HOT SPOT #2: STORAGE AREAS

Stocked with food, hidden from humans, dark and damp – storage areas are the perfect spot for pests to hide out in a restaurant. These areas should be monitored and cleaned on a regular basis. Use the following tips to make sure storage spaces remain a place for supplies, not a home to pests.

- **Shelve with a purpose.** Place food supplies on open-backed shelving to remove pest hiding spots. Keep shelves at least six inches off the floor and 18 inches from the wall.
- **Seal your stock.** Transfer dry goods to containers where you can keep them tightly sealed. This can help prevent odors from escaping and attracting pests.
- **When in doubt, rotate.** Rotate goods on a first in, first out (FIFO) basis so older products are always at the front of the storage area and no items are left in storage too long.

HOT SPOT #3: KITCHENS

The health inspector will be just as interested in what's cooking in your kitchen as a hungry patron. Make sure your kitchen is clean and restricts pests' access to the elements they need for survival – food, water, shelter and optimal temperatures.

- **Restrict the water source.** Pests only need a small amount of water to survive in your establishment, so a leaking faucet, dishwasher or ice machine can be enough to provide sustenance. Work with a plumber or appliance professional to quickly repair any leaks.
- **Get rid of your garbage.** Trash inside your establishment can be a welcome invitation for pests, so you want to keep it outside and dispose of it as soon as possible. While inside, make sure garbage containers are covered and properly lined. Dumpsters and any other outside trash containers should have tight-fitting lids, be cleaned and sanitized regularly, and be located at a distance from your restaurant.
- **Wipe it down.** Clean the kitchen thoroughly between shifts and at the end of each day. Be sure to sweep or mop under appliances and counters.
- **Go organic.** Consider using an organic cleaner in and around sink drains and on the kitchen floor to eliminate hard-to-remove grime. A good cleaner can break down food particles that attract pests and ensure sanitary equipment.

HOT SPOT #4: DINING AREAS

Ongoing sanitation is the best way to keep dining areas reserved for customers and not pests.

- **Wipe out pest reservations.** Thoroughly clean all dining areas at the end of each day, especially those outside. Wipe down tables and chairs between customers and then sweep and mop under them. Vacuum any carpeted areas.
- Pay attention to the patio. Hose down outdoor dining areas to remove any crumbs that collected throughout the day or spills that might attract pests. But be careful not to leave any standing water that also might draw pests looking for sustenance.

DOCUMENTATION

If monitoring hot spots is the main course, then documentation is the dessert. Yes, it's sweet to get to this point without any deductions, but you should not take it for granted either. That's because a failure in documentation can result in point deductions too. You can receive a violation for incorrect forms, insufficient information or failure to comply with applicable documentation laws.

- **Maintain service reports.** Up-to-date service reports show health inspectors that pest management is a year-round commitment. Work closely with your pest management professional at each visit, discuss their recommendations and make improvements as necessary. You also should file all documents, including annual permits, hand-washing policy, food safety staff training, and pest management documentation, in a central storage location for quick reference. Make sure all staff members know where these documents are stored.
- **Note corrective actions.** If you have a pest problem, always file a corrective action report to indicate what steps were taken to either treat a pest problem, or to fix issues contributing to pest problems.
- **Record chemical treatments.** All chemical applications should be thoroughly documented, including the trade name of the material used; the date, time and method of application; frequency of service; and certification forms for the applicator.

PRACTICE = PREPARATION

The best way to prepare for an inspection is practice. Ask your pest management professional to perform a mock inspection of your restaurant and assess any potential deductions that could arise from your pest control program. Pay special attention to "hot spots" and make sure to monitor for signs of infestations. Consider hiring an independent auditor or asking an employee to perform an additional inspection to identify potential food safety threats. Once you complete the assessment, review the results with your staff and assign everyone specific responsibilities to resolve any issues that might cause problems during an inspection.

If you follow these steps, you'll be better prepared for your next health inspection and more likely to help keep your restaurant out of the negative headlines.