

Playing By The Rules: 2009 FDA Model Food Code



**BY CINDY
RICE-ANDREA**
Eastern Food
Safety

Your health inspector arrives at your door for his biannual inspection. Immediately upon noticing him with his clipboard, your staff scurries around the kitchen to label foods in the walk-in or refrigerate foods that are sitting out. The dishwasher puts on gloves, the waitress puts her hair restraint back on. The general feeling in the establishment is tense. The manager greets the inspector and starts accompanying him around the kitchen for the inspection.

What is the inspector looking for as he's examining your facility? Many operators feel uneasy during the inspection process and don't understand that the regulator is simply ensuring that the establishment is meeting food safety guidelines in order to keep the public safe. In many cases, local or state health departments follow the guidelines developed by the Food and Drug Administration, which serves as a scientific and technical consultant to state and local regulatory agencies.

These guidelines, housed in a document termed the Model Food Code, are a set of model provisions for local and state regulatory agencies to follow, i.e., details of safe food handling practices for retail and institutional food operations. It is meant to aid health regulatory agencies in ensuring food safety and offer standards that are validated by science.

Everything relating to operating a clean, safe retail food operation is reflected in the FDA Model Food Code, from allowable kitchen materials and safe internal cooking temperatures, to allergen awareness and staff training.

The FDA Food Code is updated every two years; the most recent version is the 2009 FDA Model Food Code, which was released in November 2009. Forty-six states have adopted all or part of the FDA

Food code for health regulatory tasks.

Conference For Food Protection

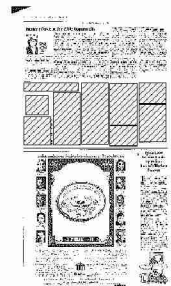
What is the basis for the information in the FDA Model Food Code, and how are decisions made on its content? It depends in good part upon the standards of the Conference for Food Protection.

The Conference for Food Protection is an independent voluntary organization that brings together representatives from the food industry, government, academia, and consumer organizations to identify emerging problems of food safety. In between the biennial meetings of the conference, committees meet to discuss these issues and make recommendations (typically based in science) on whether to amend the Food Code accordingly. Any party may submit issues for consideration during this period.

At the next biennial meeting of the conference, committee proposals are reviewed, and determinations are made for implementation into the FDA Food Code. The next biennial meeting will be held in April 2010 in Providence, R.I.

Notable Changes In The 2009 FDA Food Code

- Cut leafy greens are added to the list of Potentially Hazardous Foods and must be handled with time and temperature controls
- Cut tomatoes may be held using time as a Public Health Control, starting at any temperature
- Employees must be properly trained in food allergy awareness
- Mechanically tenderized meats must be cooked to 155° F
- Non-continuous (partial) cooking methods refined for raw animal products
- Forced air hand dryers may be non-heated, fast-blowing air
- Establishments must be free of pests
- Ground meats cannot be served undercooked from a child's menu
- Commercially packaged frozen raw animal foods and frozen ready-to-eat foods may be stored or displayed together.
- Preset tableware must be removed if unused OR cleaned/sanitized before further use if exposed to customers.
- Toilets and urinals may not be used



as service sinks.

**Critical violations...No
More?**

The 2009 FDA Model Food Code now uses three new terms to describe violations, replacing "critical" and "non-critical."

P (Priority)

This violation is an imminent health hazard and has a direct connection to preventing food-borne illness. P items require immediate correction action.

Examples: Foods not being cooked to proper internal temperatures.

F (Foundation)

F items may require immediate correction action, because they enable compliance with Priority items.

Examples: Not having a calibrated sanitized probe thermometer at the facility to

ensure proper internal food temperatures.

C (Core)

C items promote sanitation and good retail practices. They are "core" components of Standard Operating Procedures in the operation.

Examples: "Floors, Walls and Ceilings" items such as dirty floors, broken ceiling tile, greasy walls.

In short, the terminology might be changed, but good food safety practices have not. Many states are now in the process of deciding whether to adopt the 2009 FDA Food Code, all or in part. To view the 2009 FDA Food Code or for more information, log onto www.fda.gov/Food/Food-Safety/RetailFoodProtection/FoodCode/FoodCode2009. 