



San Diego County Department of Environmental Health Food & Housing Division



Summary of Recommendations for Ongoing Program Development

July 6, 2008

INTRODUCTION

The County of San Diego Department of Environmental Health (DEH) has a long standing commitment to food safety. Its proactive food safety efforts have been recognized by twice earning the prestigious national Samuel J. Crumbine Consumer Protection Award in 1959 for restaurant grading and again in 2005 for its model risk-based food safety program. In 2007, DEH embraced the opportunity to ask the National Environmental Health Association to assemble a panel of experienced professionals to conduct an independent review of the Food Safety Regulatory Program. The purpose of the panel's review was to make recommendations for ongoing program planning and development because food safety regulatory programs in California do not have state oversight.

Overall, the panel found that the San Diego County program is "an exceptionally strong program that is based on risk management principles". The report also indicates that "virtually every area of concern that the panel found has already been identified and discussed by DEH management". The following summarizes the recommendations made by the review panel and the DEH planned initiatives to implement the recommendations.

Recommendation I: A-B-C Grading system - It is recommended that the Food and Housing Division (FHD) review the A-B-C Grading System to determine if the public health messages communicating risk that are conveyed by the present placard system are accurately understood by the public, and if not, how those public communications can be improved.

DEH Planned Initiative:

1. DEH has planned for the following in our long range food safety program intervention plan:
 - Evaluate a consumer food safety knowledge survey posted on the DEH-FHD website since June 2006 to obtain information on consumer knowledge and beliefs about food safety and the posting of grade cards and inspection results online.
 - Enhance the message on the current placards.
 - Continue to actively conduct consumer outreach on food safety and the grade card system.

Timeline: Complete by January 1, 2009

Recommendation II: Unlicensed Establishments – It is recommended that the FHD reconsider the food safety program's broad goal of reducing foodborne illness to a more realistically defined goal of reducing the number of Salmonella and Campylobacter cases or outbreaks in "licensed" facilities.

DEH Planned Initiative:

DEH monitors the occurrence of reported Salmonella and Campylobacter illnesses, among other related illnesses, as part of our ongoing proactive surveillance efforts rather than as a measure of performance. This information assists in identifying baseline information on the occurrence of illness within the community. With this information, emerging foodborne illness outbreaks can be quickly identified and responded to in order to minimize illness within the community. With trends in mass production and distribution of food and increasing numbers of food related recalls, surveillance needs to continue on a countywide level.

Recommendation III: *Re-examine Food Establishment Classifications – It is recommended that the FHD re-examine establishment classifications to reduce the number of "full-service" facilities that actually pose minimal risk.*

DEH Planned Initiative:

DEH reviews food establishment classifications with the preparation of each multi-year fee package.

Timeline: Complete by July 2009

Recommendation IV: *Automating the Manual Inspection Forms and the Field Inspection System – It is recommended that the DEH/FHD continue to research how an automated field inspection system can be integrated within the current KIVA system to support the current food program.*

DEH Planned Initiative:

The DEH Information Technology Strategic Plan includes implementation of a field automation system. In addition, as part of a CAO initiative, DEH is replacing its KIVA database with the Accela Automation product. An integral part of Accela Automation will be an automated field inspection system that will allow Environmental Health Specialists to record inspection information and violations electronically while in the field.

Timeline: Complete by December 2010

Recommendation V: *Need for a Separate Data Management System –It is recommended that the DEH/FHD research the feasibility of developing a separate system with all the features needed to manage and evaluate the FHD program that can interface with the KIVA system.*

DEH Planned Initiative:

As part of the DEH Information Technology Strategic Plan and a CAO initiative, DEH is replacing its KIVA database with the Accela Automation product.

Timeline: Complete by December 2010

Recommendation VI: *Additional Information Technology Staff – It is recommended that DEH/FHD provide additional Information Technology staff for adequate technical support, maintenance of database, and preparing management reports.*

DEH Planned Initiative:

DEH is currently interviewing candidates for an Information Technology Systems Analyst to work on projects identified in our Information Technology Strategic Plan. In 2007, two additional County staff persons were assigned to assist in providing technical support for the lead FHD Information Technology Specialist.

Timeline: Complete by October 2008

Recommendation VII: Staff Capacity –It is recommended that DEH review the budget planning process and implement changes, if possible, so that new employees can be hired in a timely manner.

DEH Planned Initiative:

The Board of Supervisors approved seven positions for the DEH Food and Housing Division in Fiscal Year 07-08. Staffing levels will continue to be considered as part of the County 5-year forecasting process.

Timeline: Complete by January 2009

Recommendation VIII: Expected Workloads for Field Staff – It is recommended that DEH/FHD review the data to determine if the expectations for the number of inspections conducted per day/per year for field staff is reasonable and that adjustments be made in staffing levels, if necessary, to reflect consistently achievable inspection objectives by staff.

DEH Planned Initiative:

DEH reviews workload levels, with input from staff, as part of the five year forecasting process. Adjustments are made as necessary.

Timeline: Completed June 2008