



Food Safety

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Playing the Name & Shame Game

As a food safety specialist I am fortunate enough to travel all over Australia. Last month I spent a week in Tasmania conducting the first round of food safety audits on child care centres and aged care facilities. This month I am spending two weeks in Sydney training all 210 food handling and service staff of an aged care company. As I travel, I am amazed at the differences in attitudes, knowledge and applications of different food service employees and businesses.

As part of the introduction to my food safety training courses, I usually ask the participants who have had food poisoning and we discuss some well publicised incidents. The participants in my Sydney courses have known more about other food businesses than any other attendees that I have ever had. During a break, I was talking to one of the chefs, and he told me about the NSW Food Authority's "Name and Shame" website. I have known about the site, but never checked it out before. As an overview, the website states: "The NSW Food Authority publishes lists of businesses that have breached or are alleged to have breached NSW food safety laws. Publishing the lists gives consumers more information to make decisions about where they eat or buy food."

Obviously it is of interest to the chefs of this facility. But is it of benefit to consumers? As a consumer in a new city, I decided to have a look at the site and now I am wondering if I should have. At the time of writing (25th June 2009), there have been 1104 penalty notices issued to businesses all over New South Wales, including most of the large franchise and multi national businesses that are all known names. The website has the capacity to sort by offence, location, business name etc.

As I was staying in Randwick, I entered "Randwick" and clicked 'Enter'. Wow - 36 penalty notices to 15 different businesses including the place I had dinner last night. Now this is where the discussion started happening between my ears. Did I want to know... should I have looked before going out... the public has a right to know... what if I now get sick... etc.

So rather than focus on the "Name and Shame" aspects, I have decided to look at the positive side of food safety. How can you promote your food safety compliance and let new and existing customers know about all the good things you are doing?

In NSW, the businesses that serve food to vulnerable persons (hospital, childcare and aged care) are having their first food safety audits, and are rated from A to E. I can see businesses that achieve an A or B rating promoting their rating when trying to attract customers. What if this rating system is applied to restaurants and other food businesses that are frequented by the general public? Do you think that would make businesses improve their standards?

The Glen Eira City Council in Victoria produces a Safe Food Guide which lists all businesses within their municipality that have received a Five Star Hygiene Rating, and promotes these businesses on their website and in a brochure that is provided to all rate payers. Businesses that receive the 5 stars promote their award through signage, certificates in their windows and on their websites. So what else can you do if your council does not promote you?

One Greek restaurant near where I live was so proud of their cleaning and hygiene that they put their council inspection report on their window for all to see. Businesses

that are HACCP Certified or externally audited, should place their certifications in prominent positions in their businesses, on their websites, business cards, invoices, delivery vehicles etc. If you invest in your staff and send them on external training courses, place their certificates on the wall. This promotes your commitment to food safety, as well as acknowledging your employees contribution.

I think that customers would be much more appreciative of knowing which restaurants are doing all of the right things, rather than those that aren't. Bad ones will still slip through, but the goods ones are acknowledged. If you are doing an outstanding job, tell the world. If you are not, then lift your game.

Until next edition,
Eat well. Eat safe!

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Links:

www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/penalty-notices/
www.gleneira.vic.gov.au/Page/Page.asp?Page_Id=377&h=1

WIN!

Question of the Month

Do you have anything you'd like to know about? The next Question of the Month will be awarded a probe thermometer valued at \$60.00.

Email your questions to Gavin at: gavin@australianfoodsafety.com.au and be sure to mention Food 4 Thought for your chance to learn AND win!