

# Environmental Health

*Community Outreach Newsletter*

## Food-Borne Illness

### Prevention is our goal

Running a successful restaurant entails stress and hard work. There's even more stress when your Health Inspector is investigating your business in response to a food-borne illness complaint. A confirmed food-borne illness complaint can cause financial losses as well as leaving a negative mark on your restaurant's reputation.

You may not be able to control whether com-

plaints are filed against you, but you can make sure that you are doing all that you can to prevent a confirmed food-borne illness case at your establishment. You can do this by following some good restaurant practices. Here are some practices that can help you avoid a confirmed food-borne illness.

#### Practice good personal hygiene.

- Wash hands before

starting food preparation with liquid soap and warm water. For thorough washing, count to 20, and wash all parts of your hands. Make sure hand soap and paper towels are always nearby.

- Do not wash or reuse food preparation gloves. Always wash your hands before putting on gloves.

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#### **Our Mission:**

The Mission of Environmental Health is to promote and protect the health and safety of all persons in the City of Berkeley through education and enforcement.

## Storm Water Inspection Program

### Protecting our bay and creeks

Ah, the beauty of the San Francisco Bay, the creeks that pleasantly flow to her cool depths, the motor oil sheen on the surface of the water, and the toxic chemicals that kill the fish. The beauty of our local bay and creeks may be the stuff of poetry, but it isn't always a pretty picture.

Every day, pollutants reach our waterways when careless practices cause contaminants to flow into storm drains that eventually lead to the bay without any treatment whatsoever. Anything that is dumped onto the surface of the ground, or is hosed into the gutter, eventually gets washed by rainwater

into storm drains.

The storm drain system is meant to collect and transport rain and flood waters, channeling them into the creeks and bay. The sanitary sewer system, by contrast, carries sink and toilet wastewater to a treatment plant. These

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# Sponges, Rags and Dish Towels, Oh My!

## Surprising culprits that can spread food-borne illness



Think household germs, and chances are you'll think of the bathroom. Yet when scientists from the University of Arizona in Tucson sampled surfaces from kitchens and bathrooms in the same house, "consistently, kitchens came up dirtier" noted microbiologist Carlos Enriquez. This trend is likely to be the same in a restaurant. Surprised?

"We have swabbed the toilet rim, for instance, and seldom do we find fecal coliform bacteria there, surprising as that may sound," Mr. Enriquez observes. "Enter the kitchen, though, and they're everywhere--in sponges, dish towels, the sink and even countertops and cutting boards. So my boss usually jokes about it being safer eating dinner in the bathroom," he says.

But kitchen pathogens are no laughing matter. In the United States, the diseases they cause kill an estimated 9,000 persons each year, mostly the very young, the very old, and those with severely weakened immune systems. The cost of treating food-borne infections ranges from \$5 billion to \$22 billion annually, according to the U.S. General Accounting Office.

We all know that frequent hand washing and proper food handling techniques can greatly reduce the risk of spreading food-borne illness. But what other less obvious culprits can lead to the spread of harmful bacteria and microbes in our kitchens?

Sponges can provide an ideal way to spread disease. Bacteria love to live inside sponges because a sponge provides a hospitable environment of continual moisture and concavities (little holes) that make up a perfect breeding ground for all kinds of disease causing organisms. Bacteria from food such as raw meats and vegetables tend to be concentrated in the kitchen sink and drain. This leads to contamination of the sponge during utensil washing. Key to the survival of the bacteria is a surface easy to cling to, a steady supply of nutrients such as microscopic scraps of food, and ample moisture.

All these bacteria from the sponge then may be spread to surrounding surfaces that are wiped down in an attempt to clean. If a contaminated sponge stays moist, the number of live microbes doesn't decrease for up to two weeks. Bacteria can even survive for at least 2 days in a damp sponge gradually drying in the air. On dry surfaces, resident bacteria survive no more than a few hours. However, that is plenty long enough for a food handler to infect another source of food or his or her hands during food preparation.

Cloth rags and dish towels are not much better at preventing the spread of bacteria if they are not kept properly sanitized. They share many of the same characteristics as sponges and can spread bacteria in the same manner.

So, how can we best avoid spreading bacteria if a sponge must be used to wash dishes and utensils? First, it is never recommended that a sponge be used for general surface cleaning in a kitchen. Also, wooden and plastic cutting boards, with their accumulation of scars and cracks should never be cleaned with a sponge due to a doubly high potential for bacterial contamination.

For sanitation of sponges and dish towels, use a solution of 100 ppm bleach and water (one teaspoon of bleach per gallon of water). Wiping rags for customer tables and chairs may be held in this solution and re-used as long as the solution remains visibly clean.

In addition to sanitizing a sponge in a bleach solution, you can also sanitize a damp, clean sponge by placing it in a microwave oven on "high" for a minimum of two minutes. After sanitizing your sponge, always let it air dry as rapidly as possible.

By following these simple practices you can help prevent the spread of harmful bacteria in your kitchen.

# Storm Water Inspection Program

## Protecting our bay and creeks

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are completely separate systems.

We all have a stake in taking responsibility for keeping pollution out of the storm drain system, creeks, and bay. Residential and commercial activities can contribute to storm water pollution if they don't follow best management practices (BMP's). BMP's are methods and practices such as good housekeeping, spill prevention, or treatment measures to prevent or minimize pollutant discharges to storm drain systems.

In an effort to protect the water, municipalities in Alameda County have launched a public education campaign and inspection program. Inspectors work with commercial and industrial businesses to identify and control potential discharge of pollutants to the storm drain system. Most of the education and inspection is geared toward

commercial activity as opposed to residential because commercial facilities engage in daily activities that can contribute to contamination. Residential properties are capable too, but on a much less frequent basis. For example, a homeowner washing a car in the driveway might be a once a month occurrence that results in a soapy water runoff going in to the storm drain, but a commercial car wash business washes perhaps a hundred cars every day!

To assist commercial businesses in storm water compliance efforts, Environmental Health will be con-

ducting storm water inspections at Berkeley food facilities that pose a high risk potential for illegal discharge. Armed with informational flyers and posters that highlight good and bad practices, inspectors will help facilities develop BMP's to prevent discharge, keeping our waterways clean. There are many things businesses can do to ensure that "only rain gets in the drain," but they are too numerous to list here. If you would like more information about what you can do, please visit the Alameda County Urban Run-off Clean Water Program website at [www.cleanwaterprogram.org](http://www.cleanwaterprogram.org), or call (510)-670-5543 to speak to program representative. Environmental Health inspectors are also available at (510) 981-5310.



## Environmental Health Welcomes New Inspectors

### Jeffrey Diep and Joe Germono join the Division

Environmental Health welcomes to the fold two Environmental Health Specialists, Jeffrey Diep and Joe Germono. Both inspectors bring to Berkeley years of valuable experience in the field of Environmental Health, and will be fine additions to our Division.

Jeffrey Diep comes to Berkeley after working for the County of

Los Angeles Department of Environmental Health. Mr. Diep has a degree in agricultural biology from Cal Poly Pomona and is a Registered Environmental Health Specialist in the State of California.

Joe Germono previously worked for the Fresno County Environmental Health Department. Mr. Germono is also a Registered Environmental Health Specialist in the State of

California, and obtained a degree from University of California at Davis in the field of food science.

Both Mr. Diep and Mr. Germono are pleased to be working for the City of Berkeley, and look forward to providing a high level of service to the community.

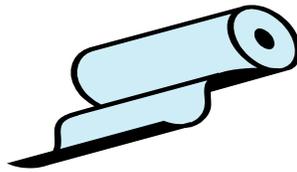
# Food-Borne Illness Prevention is our goal

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- Clean under your fingernails and keep your nails short.
- Place bandages on any cuts or burns on your skin.
- Wear a clean hat or a hairnet. Tie hair back if it is long.
- Make sure you start the day with clean clothes and an apron.

## Exclude sick employees

- Send sick employees home; especially those with vomiting, Jaundice, or diarrhea. They can contaminate the foods you sell and make other people ill.
- If sick employees need to work, keep them away from any foods.



## Cook foods adequately

- Use a calibrated thermometer and insert it in the thickest part of the food when taking the temperature to make sure your foods are completely cooked. [Note: Temperature, and NOT cooking time or the way food looks, is the only way to accurately tell if food is cooked properly.] The following are the minimum temperature cooking requirements as stated in the California Retail Food Facilities Law (CURFFL):
- Poultry, stuffed foods, reheated foods: **165 degrees F.**
- Beef: **157 degrees F.**
- Pork, eggs, fish: **145 degrees F.**
- Cook shellfish until the shell opens.



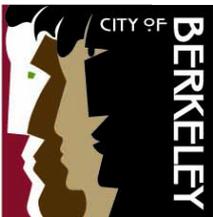
- Cook eggs until the yolk and white is firm, unless your customer requests otherwise.

## Hold foods at safe temperatures

- Keep cold foods at or below **41 degrees F.**
- Hold hot foods at or above **135 degrees F.**
- Do not keep foods in deep, large containers. Store and cool foods in multiple, shallow containers less than 4 inches deep for quicker cooling.
- Defrost frozen foods by storing in a refrigerator for at least one day before use, or under cool running water or in the microwave.

## Avoid Cross Contamination

- Separate cooked and ready to eat foods from raw meats, poultry, seafood and their juices.



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**Protecting public health.**

