

FoodBytes

Food Protection Program

Fall, 2008 and Winter, 2009

Indiana State Department of Health

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Food protection a must during flooding

Recent flooding has presented genuine challenges to both food establishment operators and health department inspectors. Northwest Indiana is the most recent area to be a victim of heavy rains.

There is always a temptation for an operator to keep an establishment open after suffering damage from an adverse weather event, but this is almost always not possible without jeopardizing food safety. Flood water will likely prevent sewer systems from functioning properly and can often result in backflow problems in a food establishment, especially in low areas like basements. The potable water supply may also be compromised.

Either the lack of potable water or sewage backflow problem require a food

establishment to close. Once closed, regardless of whether it was a health department decision, a food establishment may only reopen after permission is granted by the health department having jurisdiction.

When local flooding occurs, local health department inspectors should contact all their retail food establishments that may be affected. Ask the operators if they have any problems with backflow. A site visit might also be needed to determine if there is a public health risk.



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Emergencies require cooperation

When disasters strike, such as the recent flooding in Indiana, many agencies may be called to give aid.

Local health departments might find themselves in need of local police and fire departments, as well as state agencies like ISDH, the Indiana Depart-

ment of Environmental Management or the Board of Animal Health.

Do you have emergency contact numbers for other agencies? Do they all have your emergency contact information, especially after normal hours?

Rare Salmonella strain leads to extended FDA warning

Was it the tomatoes, Jalapeño and Serrano peppers, or something else that led to hundreds of reports of people sick with a rare strain of *Salmonella* identified as *Saintpaul*?

This illness, which began in the Spring, didn't fit the pattern of other illness outbreaks. Investigators thought they had found the common factors connecting those who became ill, which led them to tomatoes only to find that other cases had emerged that didn't fit the profile.

Published news accounts say that the traceback procedures didn't always work. Sometimes, produce from different sources were

intermixed during repacking at one of the 100-plus distributors and importers. U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) pointed to paper records kept by many small distributors that required time to decipher.

Produce may pass through up to a half dozen distribution points before reaching the final destination.

FDA investigators were drawn to one small distributor in Texas where the *Saintpaul* strain was discovered in

Jalapeños. Samples of Serrano peppers and irrigation water from the source farm in Mexico were also found to have the *Salmonella* strain present.

FDA still considers the outbreak ongoing as new cases of *Saintpaul* continue to be reported. FDA recommends that retailers not sell any peppers that originated in Mexico. No advisories are in place for peppers grown in the United States.



When bad conditions happen, prepare for the worst

Many food establishment operators take their potable water source for granted and fail to consider where and how water is used in their establishments. Equipment that requires potable water includes, but is not limited to, ice machines, soft drink dispensers, dish machines, and sinks.

Water is used for cooking, cleaning, and the preparing of raw fruit and vegetables. It is not worth the risk to attempt to operate without potable water, and inspectors should clearly stress that point. The food code requires potable water be available and used within every retail and wholesale food establishment.

Locals need to prepare

Local health departments like Johnson County were challenged during recent flooding. Several inches of rain poured into the health department. As flood water

rose, employees were able to move equipment and records above the flood water. It could have been worse had they not acted quickly.

What would your health department do if suddenly many records were gone? Could you function? How long would it take you to resume operation?

The Johnson County Health Department was able to temporarily relocate in an empty bank building

and hold staff meetings outside.

For those storing data electronically, frequent backups are in order. Consider storing paper files in a secured upper level above any possible flooding, or in water-tight containers. Have a backup plan to relocate in a temporary location if a "100-year flood" strikes.



Flooding destroyed several vehicles and damaged the low levels at the Johnson County Health Department.

What would your health department do if suddenly records were destroyed?

Photo courtesy: Johnson Co. Health Dept.

Olympic food vendors offer unusual fare

It takes a lot of food to feed more than 10,000 Olympic athletes. It also takes a lot of space, as shown by the Olympic Village Dining Facility, which covered an area the size of three football fields.

The Beijing Olympics official web site has reported that food planning for the 2008 Olympics started years ago. Prospective food handlers were trained in food safety practices, and potential food vendors submitted to having more than 16,000 food samples checked for pathogens.

During the Olympics, members

of the “food safety team” watched over 1,616,830 meals and snacks for athletes, staff and media. Foods were offered to please palates from all over the world.

Tang Yunhua, spokesperson for Food Safety Coordination at the Beijing Food Safety Administration Office, said that not a single food safety issue was found.

Prior to the event, controls were extended over agriculture and livestock farms with strict



Street vendors offer many food choices usually cooked on sticks over a wood or coal fire. The smoke from the high number of vendors is said to increase air pollution. Street food ranged from dog brain soup to lizard legs to fried scorpions and beetles.

(Continued on page 5)

Handling tomatoes, greens, other produce safely

Recalls connected with fresh produce has brought up new concerns about how to handle such food properly to achieve safety. Some public health professionals believe that food safety concerns with produce is higher than with raw meats.

Inspectors must look at fresh produce being used in restaurants and ask how the produce is being prepared. Sec. 175 of 410 IAC 7-24 requires that raw fruits and vegetables be “thoroughly washed in water to remove soil before being cut, combined with other ingredients, cooked, served, or offered for consumption.” The fact that some washing may have occurred prior to

The fact that some washing may have occurred prior to packing the product is not sufficient.

packing the product is not sufficient. All produce must be washed on site. Water should be used that is about 10° F. warmer than the produce being washed. This reduces the chance of pathogen infiltration into the produce. Noting that it “looks clean” is not acceptable.

Produce should be inspected for damage like bruising and those bad areas should be cut away. Produce should



not be mushy or moldy. Change wash water often. Clean and sanitize prep sinks and utensils.

The washing requirement does not apply to grocery stores where it is expected that the consumer will wash produce before eating, and it is not offered in a ready-to-eat form.

What about pre-washed?

Pre-washed, pre-cut produce may be used without further washing. Packaged produce for retail sales will state that it is pre-washed.

But as a further safety precaution, such product could still be washed when opened. All produce in opened bags should be washed.

Although not required, it is recommended that cut tomatoes and leafy greens be kept refrigerated.

Retail / Wholesale programs merged

Then there was one. In what is planned as a cost-saving move, the Retail and Wholesale Food Protection sections of the Food Protection Program (FPP) have merged into one program.

All but two FPP field staff will be performing both retail and wholesale inspections, and all will be providing technical assistance to local health departments following a brief period of cross training.

It is expected that travel costs will be reduced by this merger.

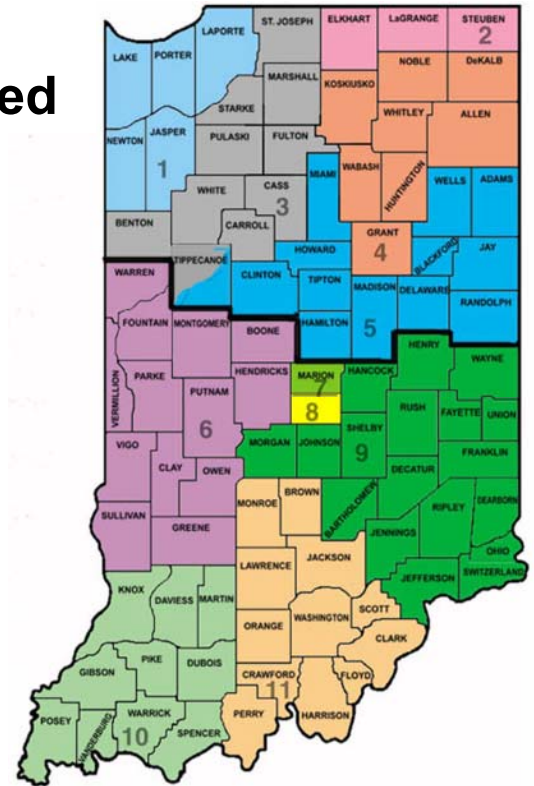
Information on the change was sent to local health departments.

Field staff and their newly

assigned areas (see the map) are:

- Rhonda Madden, 1;
- Kris Thomas, 2;
- Ed Norris, 3;
- Dan Miller, 4;
- Mark Mattox, 5;
- Lisa Harrison, 6;
- Andrew Miller, 7;
- Gale Woods, 8;
- Steve Allen, 9;
- Paula Proctor, 10,
- Hank Wolfe, 11.

Marion and Tippecanoe Counties will each be shared by two staff members.



Grocers take action to sanitize grocery carts

Customers have been concerned that the carts they use in grocery stores might be contaminated by previous customers. Some stores have offered sanitized wipes that customers may use to wipe down handles and other areas of the carts they push to remove the germs.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have concluded from studies that infants can be at risk when riding in carts that may have previously carried meats. The chance of contacting *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* greatly increases for infants riding in shopping carts that are not sanitized.

FDA and CDC say infants can be at risk when riding in carts that previously carried meats.

Sensing a market, some companies have come forward with possible solutions. Instead of just offering a means of cleaning for customers to apply to handles, they are looking at ways to clean the entire cart.

PureCart

Systems, one such company, utilizes a spray method as carts are pushed through an on site enclosure. According to the company's web site, its sanitizing system will achieve more than a 99% kill rate on bacteria, yeast, fungus and mold. The company says the solution dries quickly and is safe.

Another company offering a way to sanitize grocery carts is

Sanitize Systems, which is retrofitted to an existing room in the facility. The company says that its system is completely automatic and can sanitize up to 300 carts at one time. They claim that common bacteria and viruses are killed and that the product will air dry almost immediately with virtually no runoff because the spray droplets are so small. Once dry, the product is safe.

The company's Web site says that surfaces do not have to be fully cleaned before the product will work.

Another option for consumers is to purchase a product like *The Healthy Handle*, which slips over shopping cart handles in such a way that the consumer never has to touch the cart.

Railroad camp cars subject to inspection by year end

Following action by the Indiana General Assembly in 2007, the Indiana State Department of Health has adopted a rule that would cover inspection of railroad camp cars. Complaints surfaced from some rail workers that health conditions on these trains were not adequate.

Railroad crews typically travel in mobile camps to perform repairs and upgrades to railroad beds and are often housed and fed on trains designed for this purpose.

The new rule, to be effective by the end of 2008, states that enforcement shall be the responsibility of local health officers and that an

“inspection fee” to cover expenses be charged and paid by the railroad operating the mobile camp.

The new law will require railroad companies to notify local health departments within two business days of arrival within their jurisdiction and to request an inspection to assure that the facilities are “safe, sanitary, healthful, and in compliance with the rule.”

Such railroad camps typically have sleeping accommodations in some cars and include a kitchen and dining facility in separate cars. The food service is subject to the requirements of the food code, 410

IAC 7-24. The camp must have potable water, proper sewage disposal, and adequate living space.



This is a typical foodservice car at a railroad mobile camp. The car is self-contained and receives supplies of food and fuel weekly.

Olympic food (continued)

(Continued from page 3)

inspection standards, and the transportation vehicles were also inspected.

Tang said China will promote those safety measures that proved efficient after the Olympics.



Food fare available in Beijing during the 2008 Olympics included sea urchins in the center, escargots to the left. Above the urchins are snakes and silk worms.

Scorpions and beetles pictured in the upper right picture are among the foods available to Olympic visitors.



Photos from www.odditycentral.com

To the right (from left to right) are soft shell shrimp, lobsters, and regular shrimp. It is common to find food offered on sticks.



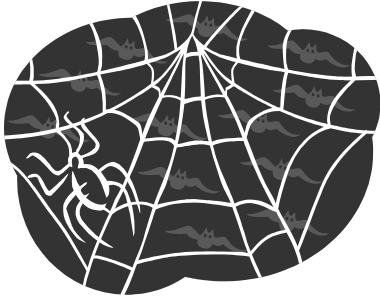
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Tidbits, Crumbs, and Leftovers

- ◆ *George Jones has been appointed to fill the position vacated recently by Shirley Vargas. With the restructuring of the Food Protection Program, George will oversee all inspectors in central and southern Indiana, while inspectors in the northern part of the state will report to Scott Gilliam. Gilliam remains Food Protection Program head.*
- ◆ *"Nothing impacts the future more than how we take care of our environment and our public health" - Judy O'Bannon*
- ◆ *Indiana State Health Commissioner, Judith A. Monroe, M. D. has been elected president of the Association of State and*

Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO). She was chosen by unanimous vote and took office immediately.

- ◆ *After 42 years of service, Edward Zglenicki has retired from the Food Protection Program. Ed served the South-eastern part of Indiana prior to retirement.*
- ◆ *This issue of FoodBytes is actually two issues in one, covering Fall of 2008 and Winter 2009. The*

next issue will be distributed around April 2009.

Send your questions and comments to the e-mail or postal address on this page.

Calendar

December 2, 3, 4
ISDH Orientation in Rice Auditorium
December 9
Railroad Camp Car Rule training
Miami Co. Fairgrounds, Peru
April 16, 2009
IEHA Spring Conference