

# Environmental Health Specialists' Attitudes and Practices Concerning Food Safety in Restaurants: Preliminary Results

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## **NEHA Poster**

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#### Introduction

Environmental health specialists employ edit injustific health departments are responsible for a variety of instrusion released tood safety, teckularing conducting food safety inspections. Vera come public health phracisioners and researches have argued that, due to a variety of sweek near such cannot be a precision and entire to design and precision are released in their ability to improve measurament bod astery (if) you, 2004; Chris' ability to improve measurament bod astery (if) you, 2004; Chris' ability to improve measurament bod astery (if) you, 2004; Chris' ability to improve measurament bod astery if you, 2004; Chris' ability to improve measurament bod astery if you, 2004; Chris' ability to improve measurament in your control in the properties of the properties and the discovery in the properties and the properties and the discovery in the properties and the properties and

Environmental health apecialists can provide valuable insight into the efficie meas of their restaurant inspections, the limits form of those inspections, and way as or modify inspections to improve their effects oness. Thus, this study was designed to callections from environmental health specialists." or these expire.

#### Purpose

This saudy was designed to collect qualitative data on environmental health a pecialist of six date, perceptions, and precisions correcting resumerate precision. This information can be used to develop a better understanding of environmental health a pecialist of lack likes, and how they can be modified to improve resumeration of a sleet.



#### Study Design Result

- One focus group was conducted with firmedomly selected environmental health specialists responsible for resources impections and working in day (2), couny (4), and see (2) health departments in Connecticus, Georgia, Niew York, and Tonnessee.
- The focus group was conducted through a conference call; participants dialed a sol-free number and were connected to the group discussion by an operator.
- Pericipans received a sixty dollar reimburs emers for their time and e flor.
- · Participants discussed several topics, including:
  - the effectiveness of their resourcers inspection process as identifying boothome linear risk factors.
  - \* the limitations of their resaurantins pection process,
- the difficulties they fisced when conducting inspections.
- Six more tocus groups will be conducted in the spring of 2004.

#### Results

#### Effectiveness of restaurant inspection process

- Most participants fell: that their inspections were fairly good, but not perfect, as identifying the observe lines a risk factors.
- Most perfolpens utilized "inspection checkliss" during their inspections, and let it measure items on the checkliss were not useful in ease sing bodborne lineas. risk (e.g., cleen/ineas of during ser lide).
- Participants list: that specific portions of their inspection process or recent changes in their inspection process increased the effectiveness of their inspections. For
  - One inspection process included two parts—the first focused exclusively on footborne illness risk factors, while the second focused on is sues, the were less, commit to footborne illness.
- In one inspection process, specialists conducted a "mini-HACCP," specifically designed to assess loodborns linear risk, in addition to their more malitional inspection other kits.
- In another inspection process, the focus had recently shilled from the completion of an inspection checklist to the evaluation of the foodborne lines a risks associated with the establishments' food handling processes.

#### Results (contrd)

#### Limitations of restaurant inspection process

Participants identified the following limits tions:

- Limited sine in eusibilizhments so complete inspecsion. This
  limits son, o ten due to inspecsion "quotas" setby
  management, makes à di ficult for specialists to observe all
  important processes as during their visit.
- Intability to inspect resident interests of their other than between 8,00 a.m. and 5,00 p.m.
   Participans used the observation of boot handling activities conducted in the evening, when establishmens are often the businst, can prove expecially useful in identifying risk flectors.
- Focus on "foors, wells, and ceilings."
   So me or all parts of the specialists "supercions focus on items the swere not critical to food safety, such as whether or not brooms were outching the floor during storage.
- Requirements to embrase non-bod salety-related requirement.
- Having to enforce non-food safety-related regulations, such as those penalising to tobacco and economics, during inspections hampens apecialists' ability to fully evaluate risk factors.

#### Difficulties faced during inspection process

- Participants identified the following difficulties:
- Specialists have difficulty communicating effectively with food managers and workest who speak a language different from their own.
- Food managers and wonless with a lack of bod salely education.
- Specialists have difficulty working with establishments to correct food under problems because food managers and workers have most had basic food under managers and do not understand food under yields or the importance of corrolling them.
- High equipyee surrover.
- When a pecialists resum to establishments, for reinspections, the employees with which they originally worked to correct a focal sale, by problem are often no longer employed as the establishment; the food salesy problem has re-occurred, and they have to educate the new employees.
- Delbruive stansgers and owners.
   So me managers and owners do noswancio cooperate with the specialists during inspections.
- Lack of prior is nowledge about reusisurant processes.
   A lack of prior is nowledge about as sabilishmens: 'processes makes is difficult for a pecialism to fully assess the earablishmens: 'risk during inspecion.



#### Discussion

Profilmary results indicate that while most participants believed that their measuremisepactions were thisly pool as identifying thostborne illness risks, participants whose inspection process those and more on restaument both handling processes, so a opposed to more mostilized in special checklistems, bit is the their inspections were been as identifying risk.

Specialists identified any emilliprinarions as accised with restaurant inspecialons, and these centered around law themself-one and convers. Specialists add not feel that they had enough time in establishments to adequately assess risks, and that hey were notable to conclude their his pecialons as since in which visits a would be highest (pg., peak dinner hours). Specialists also indicated their the conversion of their inspecialons was problematic—they were regarded to assessa toccars that they did not their laws inspectation to allow.

Specialists also identified difficulties they faced during the inspecial process. These included language betriers, food managers and workers' lack difficial safety education, high employee surnover, defensive managers, and owners, and a

Analyses of the results from the additional 6 focus groups should provide furnishment insight into one incommonal head to specialists, educates and perceptions concerning resusance inspections, and how inspections process as could be entidled to be too years as footborner libras visit.

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The Convictormental Health Specialists Network (UHS-Heig), a collaborative affect of the Convictormental Health Services. Branch of the Centers. Br Disease Control and Prevention (CGC), the US-Feed and Drug Attentions and the US-Department of Agriculative, and eight as an breath department of Agriculative, and eight as an breath department of Collibrial, Colorado, Connectica, Georgie, Microscop, New York, Cropper, Tennesseely provided valuable correlations to the development of this audy.

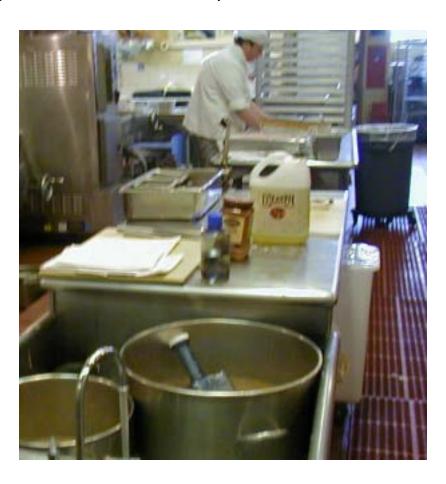
## Introduction

Environmental health specialists employed in public health departments are responsible for a variety of restaurant-related food safety tasks, including conducting food safety inspections. Yet some public health practitioners and researchers have argued that, due to a variety of weaknesses, routine restaurant inspections are limited in their ability to improve restaurant food safety (Bryan, 2004; Ehiri & Morris, 1994). Additionally, research on the relationship between food safety and restaurant inspections has been equivocal. Some studies have found a relationship between inspections and food safety (as measured by inspection scores, illness complaints, and outbreak rates) (Irwin, Ballard, Grendon, & Kobayashi, 1989), while others have not (Cruz, Katz, & Suarez, 2001; Mathias et al., 1994).

Environmental health specialists can provide valuable insight into the effectiveness of their restaurant inspections, the limitations of those inspections, and ways to modify inspections to improve their effectiveness. Thus, this study was designed to collect data from environmental health specialists' on these topics.

# Purpose

This study was designed to collect qualitative data on environmental health specialists' attitudes, perceptions, and practices concerning restaurant inspections. This information can be used to develop a better understanding of environmental health specialists' activities, and how they can be modified to improve restaurant food safety.



## Study Design

- One focus group was conducted with 8 randomly selected environmental health specialists responsible for restaurant inspections and working in city (2), county (4), and state (2) health departments in Connecticut, Georgia, New York, and Tennessee.
- The focus group was conducted through a conference call; participants dialed a toll-free number and were connected to the group discussion by an operator.
- Participants received a sixty dollar reimbursement for their time and effort.
- Participants discussed several topics, including:
  - the effectiveness of their restaurant inspection process at identifying foodborne illness risk factors,
  - the limitations of their restaurant inspection process, and
  - the difficulties they faced when conducting inspections.
- Six more focus groups will be conducted in the spring of 2004.

## Results

### **Effectiveness of restaurant inspection process**

- Most participants felt that their inspections were fairly good, but not perfect, at identifying foodborne illness risk factors.
- Most participants utilized "inspection checklists" during their inspections, and felt that some items on the checklists were not useful in assessing foodborne illness risk (e.g., cleanliness of dumpster lids).
- Participants felt that specific portions of their inspection process or recent changes in their inspection process increased the effectiveness of their inspections. For example:
  - One inspection process included two parts--the first focused exclusively on foodborne illness risk factors, while the second focused on issues that were less central to foodborne illness.
  - In one inspection process, specialists conducted a "mini-HACCP," specifically designed to assess foodborne illness risk, in addition to their more traditional inspection checklist.
  - In another inspection process, the focus had recently shifted from the completion
    of an inspection checklist to the evaluation of the foodborne illness risks
    associated with the establishments' food handling processes.

# Results (Cont'd)

### Limitations of restaurant inspection process

- Participants identified the following limitations:
- Limited time in establishments to complete inspection. This limitation, often due to inspection "quotas" set by management, makes it difficult for specialists to observe all important processes during their visit.
- Inability to inspect establishments at times other than between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Participants said that observation of food handling activities conducted in the evening, when establishments are often the busiest, can prove especially useful in identifying risk factors.
- Focus on "floors, walls, and ceilings."
  Some or all parts of the specialists' inspections focus on items that were not critical to food safety, such as whether or not brooms were touching the floor during storage.
- Requirements to enforce non-food safety-related regulations.
  Having to enforce non-food safety-related regulations, such as those pertaining to tobacco and economics, during inspections hampers specialists' ability to fully evaluate risk factors.

# Result (Cont'd)

### Difficulties faced during inspection process

Participants identified the following difficulties:

- Language barriers.
  Specialists have difficulty communicating effectively with food managers and workers who speak a language different from their own.
- Food managers and workers with a lack of food safety education. Specialists have difficulty working with establishments to correct food safety problems because food managers and workers have not had basic food safety training, and do not understand food safety risks or the importance of controlling them.
- High employee turnover.
  When specialists return to establishments for re-inspections, the employees with which they originally worked to correct a food safety problem are often no longer employed at the establishment, the food safety problem has re-occurred, and they have to educate the new employees.
- Defensive managers and owners.
  Some managers and owners do not want to cooperate with the specialists during inspections.
- Lack of prior knowledge about restaurant processes.
  A lack of prior knowledge about establishments' processes makes it difficult for specialists to fully assess the establishments' risk during inspection.

## Discussion

Preliminary results indicate that while most participants believed that their restaurant inspections were fairly good at identifying foodborne illness risks, participants whose inspection process focused more on restaurant food handling processes, as opposed to more traditional inspection checklist items, felt that their inspections were better at identifying risk.

Specialists identified several limitations associated with restaurant inspections, and these centered around two themes--time and content. Specialists did not feel that they had enough time in establishments to adequately assess risks, and that they were not able to conduct their inspections at times in which risks would be highest (e.g., peak dinner hours). Specialists also indicated that the content of their inspections was problematic--they were required to assess factors that they did not feel were important to safety.

Specialists also identified difficulties they faced during the inspection process. These included language barriers, food managers' and workers' lack of food safety education, high employee turnover, defensive managers and owners, and a lack of prior knowledge at restaurant processes.

Analyses of the results from the additional 6 focus groups should provide further insight into environmental health specialists' attitudes and perceptions concerning restaurant inspections, and how inspections processes could be modified to better assess foodborne illness risk.

## References

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