



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

NEIL ABERCROMBIE
GOVERNOR

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH BEGINS POSTING NEW COLOR-CODED PLACARDS AS PART OF STATEWIDE FOOD SAFETY PROGRAM UPGRADES

HONOLULU – The Hawaii State Department of Health (DOH) will begin posting new color-coded placards at Oahu restaurants today as part of the state's new "Food Safety Code" (Hawaii Administrative Rules, Title 11, Chapter 50, Food Safety Code) signed into law by Gov. Neil Abercrombie earlier this year. The new placards will be posted after each health inspection is completed at every food establishment that holds a DOH permit. The placards indicate whether a food establishment has passed its health inspection, received a conditional pass, or has been closed due to permit suspension.

"Hawaii consumers will have more peace of mind about being protected from foodborne illnesses and other health hazards when they're eating out this summer," said Gary Gill, deputy director of environmental health. "The new food safety rules let consumers know which food establishments have violations and may cause some to think twice about eating at locations where concerns are not being addressed."

More than 10,000 food establishments statewide prepare or serve food and require a DOH permit to operate their business under the law. There are roughly 6,000 such establishments on Oahu, 1,800 on Hawaii Island, 1,600 on Maui, and 690 on Kauai. This includes restaurants, hotels, caterers, food warehouses, markets, convenience stores, lunch wagons, push carts, and institutional kitchens for healthcare facilities, preschools, elementary schools, adult and child day care centers, and prisons.

"The new law has a built-in incentive for self-policing among food facilities to correct their violations in a timely manner," said Peter Oshiro, environmental health program manager in the Sanitation, Food and Drug and Vector Control Branch of DOH. "The resulting increased efficiency will free up our inspectors to devote more time to conduct inspections of all of our facilities, and less time on follow-up with the same establishments that do not address their violations in a timely manner."

The new law follows what has already been occurring in other states across the nation. In anticipation of the rollout of the new law, DOH has been meeting with the boards and members of numerous industry trade associations to keep them fully informed of the pending rule change.

The law has received support and endorsement from the boards of directors of such groups as the Hawaii Restaurant Association, and has received no objections from the Hawaii Food Industry Association, Hawaii Food Manufacturing Association, Hawaii Lodging and Tourism Association, and Hawaii Farmers markets.

“Food safety and sanitation are high priorities for all of our members,” said Roger Morey, executive director of the Hawaii Restaurant Association, which represents 3,500 locations in the restaurant, food service, hospitality and tourism industries that employ more than 82,000 people statewide.

“We believe this new law is good for Hawaii residents and visitors to our Islands, and will help to demonstrate our members’ commitment to high standards in all aspects of food handling. A green placard represents a seal of approval from the Department of Health, which will further support the business of our members.”

The Color-Coded Placard System

The color-coded placard system is based on an award-winning environmental health program adopted from Sacramento County. After completion of an inspection, DOH will post a color-coded placard to indicate the compliance status of that food establishment, which will be visible to patrons who visit the establishment and to the general public.

A green card will be for those establishments with no more than one critical violation that must be corrected at the time of inspection; a yellow card will be used those with two or more critical violations; and a red will be used for those food establishments that need to be immediately closed because they pose an imminent health hazard to the community. (See attached fact sheet for more information.)

Three Risk Categories

Each food establishment is categorized into one of three risk levels for foodborne illnesses. Those at the highest risk levels are category 1 and those with the least risk are considered category 3. The number of food handling or preparation procedures determines the level of risk. Approximately one-third of the inventory of food establishments are in each risk category.

A category 1 establishment is a full-service establishment that has six to eight different food procedures, including receiving, cold storage, hot storage, thermal processing, transportation, cooling, reheating and display. About one-third of Oahu food establishments fall into category 1. Regular inspections (not follow-up inspections) of Category 1 establishments will be conducted three times a year.

Category 2 establishments, typically fast food establishments, which have three to five procedures, will be

inspected twice a year. Category 3 establishments, such as cookie or ice cream shops have up to two procedures and will be inspected annually.

The new risk-based inspection schedules began today.

Increased Efficiency and Funding for DOH

DOH inspectors now spend 60 percent of their time on follow-up inspections. By encouraging self-policing and faster responses to violations, this will free up the inspectors to conduct three regular inspections on high-risk food establishments each year, and significantly reduce the number of follow-up inspections.

On Oahu, there are currently 25 DOH inspectors in the field with six more to be hired this summer and fall for a total of 31; eight on Hawaii Island; four on Maui with up to 4 more to be hired this year; and three on Kauai.

“With the growing number of establishments, this new system allows us to be more efficient in conducting inspections,” Oshiro said.

As part of the new law, DOH also revamped its fee structure for permits, effective Feb. 24, 2014. Previously, the average permit fee paid by all food establishments was \$46 in three different fee categories. There are now 49 different categories of food establishments and the average fee will be \$200. Permit and renewal fees for permanent establishments range from \$100 for a mobile hot dog cart to \$600 for a hotel main kitchen preparing food for banquets and conventions. The increased permit fees are being used to help fund the additional inspectors and program enhancements such as web-based IT infrastructure and online inspection results.

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FACT SHEET

HOW THE COLOR-CODED PLACARD SYSTEM WORKS

The Hawaii Department of Health will post a color-coded placard after an initial inspection of a food service organization to indicate its compliance status. This placard will be visible to patrons who visit the establishment and to the general public.

The law requires these placards to be posted in a display case outside on the outside wall of the establishment, within five feet of the main entry, or in an area readily visible to patrons when they enter the

food establishment. The placard must remain in place until a new placard is issued.

Green:

Food establishments receive a green placard if they have no more than one critical violation that was observed during an initial inspection, or that a violation was immediately corrected.

Yellow:

A yellow placard is posted when a food establishment has a critical violation and it is not corrected, or when two or more critical violations are observed by a Department of Health inspector.

Hawaii Department of Health inspectors will typically conduct follow-up inspections within two days to determine if violations have been corrected. Under the new law, there is more incentive for establishments to correct their violations in a timely manner without the need for ongoing monitoring by inspectors.

Establishments can receive a green placard if follow-up inspections verify that corrections have been made.

A yellow placard functions as a condition use permit. If it is taken down before corrections are made, an establishment could face fines of \$1,000 per day.

Red:

Food establishments that pose a danger to health of the community are immediately closed. A red placard is posted if food establishments must close because there is an immediate health threat to the community. Some of these conditions can include: evidence of foodborne illnesses or disease transmission from food establishment, an employee has a communicable disease; hot or cold water are not available as required; no power is available to operate refrigeration or cooking equipment; and sewage overflow or flooding.

In severe cases where corrections are not made, the department may suspend a permit to operate.