

Sanitation Solutions

Anyone can walk into an institutional kitchen and find sanitation problems. However, it is more difficult to implement systems that actually *improve* the sanitary conditions to provide safe and wholesome food. Federal tag number F371 (Sanitary conditions—facilities must store, prepare, distribute, and serve food under sanitary conditions—to prevent food borne illness) is usually within the top 10 citations on nursing home surveys throughout the US. This article will focus on how you can become proactive in preventing sanitation citations, and focus on sanitation solutions.

Department of health surveyors are instructed to follow these practices in long term care facilities: One surveyor is assigned to conduct the kitchen/food service observation to observe the sanitation practices and cleanliness of the kitchen. They observe whether potentially hazardous foods have been left on counter tops or steam tables and/or if being prepared, the manner in which foods are being thawed, the cleanliness, sanitary practices, and appearance of kitchen staff (e.g., appropriate attire, hair restraints). Surveyors are to direct observations to the tray line and kitchen to determine: If the food is being held for more than thirty minutes prior to food service, e.g., in the steam table, oven, refrigerator rather than freezer for frozen foods, etc.; and if cooked leftovers used during food preparation were stored and used within the appropriate time frames, and reheated to at least 165 degrees F.

The best way to be proactive, is first to be familiar with what the surveyors will review in your facility. Review the state operations manual for more information. Then follow these steps for a positive solution to sanitation and food safety issues.

1. Use a standardized sanitation and food safety inspection form. The Kitchen/Food Service Observation worksheet (HCFA-804, Exhibit 92), CD-HCF's sanitation form (available at www.cd-hcf.org, or your local health department form are all good examples. Use the form to guide you in completing a sanitation survey in your facility. An initial inspection will determine where problems are located.
2. After completing the survey, develop goals and a plan of action with the food service manager. Be realistic in the amount of time it may take to implement new policies and procedures. Start with the highest priority items first, and work your way through the list.
3. Train supervisory staff on best practices for food safety and sanitation. Supervisors should be certified in through an approved food safety program such as the National Restaurant Association's Education Foundation's ServSafe® program, Dietary Manager's Association Certification in Food Protection Program, or programs offered by your local health department.
4. Develop cleaning schedules. Make sure they are reasonably quick for staff to accomplish, include cleaning instructions (your chemical company may be able to help with this), and be sure there is a measure of accountability built in to the tool. Daily, weekly, bi-monthly and monthly cleaning schedules should be maintained, and assignments should be made to each job position. Post in easy access areas and encourage daily use to assure cleaning is done in

a timely manner. Staff should sign off and date the form for accountability. Remember that some jobs may need to be done by housekeeping or maintenance. Communicate with these departments to coordinate the work assignments and keep them accountable as well.

5. Train the kitchen staff. It is imperative that staff understand why sanitation and food safety is important, so explain basics: According to Food Code 2001, 76 million people become ill from food borne illness (FBI) with 325,000 hospitalizations annually. FBI results in 5,000 (CDC, 2002) to 9,100 (National Center for Health Statistics) deaths related to foodborne diseases each year. Provide cleaning and safe food handling assignments and explain the consequences of not following assignments. Training can include a kitchen inspection with staff participation, sharing results of inspections, training on proper cleaning and allowing staff to demonstrate the cleaning techniques as you observe. Also consider the possibility of a mentoring or coaching program for staff and/or supervisors.
6. Implement a program for accountability. Accountability is usually based on the cleaning schedules, individual work areas (cooks, dietary aides, dishwashers, etc.), inspection and observation by supervisors. There should be consequences of not following the correct procedures to keep food safe. This will vary from facility to facility depending on overall personnel policies, and the comfort and training level of supervisory staff.
7. Celebrate successes! Celebrate when staff passes an internal inspection, and especially for official department of health sanitation inspections. A pizza party, small gift or other special recognition of the staff's good work will reinforce the behavior needed to keep the kitchen clean and the food safe for residents and staff.

Resources:

- * National Restaurant Association, Education Foundation 800-765-2122, ServSafe® safety program at www.restaurant.org/careers/servsafe.cfm, and the International Food Safety Council at www.nraef.org/ifsc
- * Dietary Manager's Association, DMA Food Protection Education Center, 800-323-1908, www.dmaonline.org
- * Centers for Disease Control Food Safety Office, www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/default.htm, Fight Bac at www.fightbac.org, and Gateway to Government Food Safety Information at www.foodsafety.gov
- * Guidance to Surveyors-Long Term Care Facilities, State Operations Manual, Medicare and Medicaid Requirements for Long Term Care Facilities. Health Care Financing Administration, US Department of Health and Human Services, 1999. Also found at <http://cms.hhs.gov/manuals> (paper based manuals, Pub 07, appendix P and PP)