

**SURVEY OF INNOVATIVE PRACTICES
IN
RETAIL FOOD SAFETY PROGRAMS**

**Prepared for:
SACRAMENTO COUNTY
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT**

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County and city environmental health departments:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Environmental Health Division (EHD) of the Sacramento County Environmental Management Department provides inspection, educational, consultative, and plan review services in their Retail Food Safety Program, serving more than 7,000 permitted food facilities.

Since 2002, EHD has developed and implemented many program enhancements to improve the food safety program. The improvements included variable inspection frequency based on risk assessment, public disclosure of inspection results, food safety education, a color-coded placard system and an Awards of Excellence program. EHD collaborated with industry, elected officials and the community in planning, developing and implementing these enhancements. These progressive changes have resulted in an overall increase in compliance, demonstrated by reductions in the occurrence of major violations as well as reported foodborne illness.

There is a statewide shortage of the Registered Environmental Health Specialists (REHS) required to perform enforcement activities in the food program. EHD has implemented proactive strategies in staff recruitment and retention. Non-REHS personnel such as EHS trainees and Environmental Compliance Technicians are hired to perform non-enforcement activities.

Because of limited resources, EHD must use the available funding as efficiently as possible in its service delivery. This survey is part of an effort to assess the cost-effectiveness of the program and identify innovative approaches in its administration. Standardized questionnaires were used to collect information on “Best Management Practices” from other EH jurisdictions and to solicit input from industry representatives.

Since EHD is fully funded by fees collected from regulated facilities, their fee structure, with gradual increases, provides sufficient revenue to support the program’s additional services. This survey revealed that the Sacramento County Environmental Health fees are comparable with other similar Bay Area jurisdictions.

Several innovative ideas were identified for potential areas of further enhancements. However, cost/benefit analyses of these practices should be conducted prior to their implementation. The results revealed that EHD’s Retail Food Safety Program is progressive, comprehensive and effective. The breadth of program services is extensive and meets legal mandates as well as the community’s food safety needs.

Food Safety Program Survey

Introduction

The Sacramento County Environmental Management Department (EMD), Environmental Health Division (EHD) is responsible for administering a Retail Food Safety Program to ensure that safe food is provided to the public in a sanitary manner in accordance with state law and local ordinance (Appendix A). EHD's primary goal is to reduce foodborne illness and increase general sanitation by providing inspectional and educational services to the food industry.

From 2002 to 2007, EHD initiated a series of program enhancements to improve food safety, further reduce foodborne illness, improve public disclosure of inspection results, and provide a comprehensive food safety education program. The Food Safety Program enhancements were developed and implemented in two phases. Throughout each phase, extensive efforts were made to work closely with stakeholders, obtain input from the public, and educate food facility operators. A variety of outreach methods were used including working with print, radio and television media outlets, convening focus groups, holding public workshops (including public comment periods) and attending several meetings with local business chambers and associations.

In 2003, Phase I program improvements included the public disclosure of inspection results, Awards of Excellence in Food Safety, increased inspections for food preparation facilities, Mandatory Food Safety Education, and website posting of inspection results. A Retail Food Industry Working Group (Industry Group) consisting of members of EMD management and food industry representatives was established to promote food safety through industry and regulatory agency collaboration.

From 2005-2007, EHD initiated Phase II of the Food Safety Program enhancements, including a further increase in inspection frequency, additional staffing, greater outreach and education for the regulated industry and the general public, and a new system of public disclosure.

In 2007, EHD implemented a disclosure system requiring the posting of a green, yellow or red placards at fixed food facilities following each routine or follow-up inspection. Since then, a significant amount of time and effort has been spent bringing the program to its current level through the joint efforts of EMD staff, industry representatives, professional organizations, as well as the general public.

In order to continue to maintain sufficient staffing levels and resources to provide the necessary services, the Program must operate in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

Methodology

In an effort to investigate ways to achieve these goals, EMD management chose to contract with the California Association of Environmental Health Administration (CAEHA) to select a consultant to conduct a survey focusing on “best management practices” (BMPs) of selected Environmental Health (EH) jurisdictions. Mee Ling Tung, a recently retired EH director of a large Bay Area county (Alameda), was selected for this project. Ms. Tung was selected based upon her knowledge and experience in EH and her working relationships with many directors and managers throughout California. The purpose of this survey was to identify innovative practices that could improve efficiency in Sacramento’s Food Safety Program.

The first step in the process was to review the Sacramento County Retail Food Safety Program’s administrative, management and operational policies and procedures, public outreach and educational tools and material, data management system and industry collaborative efforts. The methodology of the subsequent study was as follows:

Two questionnaires (Appendices B and C) were prepared, one for the EH jurisdictions and one for the Industry representatives. The contents of the questionnaires were developed by Ms. Tung and then reviewed by the EMD management team. The intent of the 12 open-ended EH questions was to gather information from other EH jurisdictions on the essential elements of a Food Safety Program. These elements were considered by Ms. Tung and the management team to be essential to support a successful Program. The purpose of the four open-ended questions for the Industry questionnaire was to obtain a qualitative assessment of the services provided by EMD, as well as identify potential areas for improvement.

Interview requests were sent via email to eighteen EH jurisdictions (two cities and sixteen counties). Most of the jurisdictions were selected due to their similarity in size and location to Sacramento County. Five out-of-state jurisdictions were included in the eighteen due to their creative and innovative reputation, and four of the jurisdictions were Crumbine Award recipients. The Crumbine Award is a prestigious national award given annually to local environmental health jurisdictions who demonstrate excellence and continual improvement in a comprehensive food protection program.

Fifteen jurisdictions responded to the survey requests. Five on-site meetings and ten conference calls were subsequently scheduled for the interviews. The interviews, conducted from October to December 2007, ranged in duration from 45 minutes to 2 ½ hours. Fourteen EH directors and twenty-eight EH managers participated in the interview process. Questionnaires were emailed to these fifteen jurisdictions two weeks before the scheduled meetings.

The responses to the questions were analyzed and grouped by program elements. The BMPs were summarized in Tables 1 through 9. Although the information that was collected elucidated many positive attributes of the jurisdictions surveyed, it was difficult

to substantiate and verify their success. Part of the problem reflects the lack of a standardized method to evaluate EH programs, whose primary focus is on prevention. The survey responses reflected the fact that there exists no agreed-upon definition of what constitutes a BMP, or even whether the term refers to a process, program, policy, or practice driven by economic or political influences.

RETAIL FOOD SAFETY PROGRAM ELEMENTS

RESOURCES

A comprehensive retail food safety program requires a strong infrastructure including a well-qualified and committed team of management and staff. Three essential aspects of this infrastructure are discussed in detail below. Each is necessary in order to ensure the effective, efficient and accountable operation of all the food program activities such as, budgeting, expenditure tracking, supervision, staffing and resource allocation, program and staff development, policy and procedure development, industry and media collaboration, and public outreach.

1. Cost recovery

Sacramento County

The Food Safety Program is fully funded by food facility fees resulting in no net county cost. The fees are established and adjusted based on the estimated average time spent for each type of food facility. The twenty-nine fee categories include three retail market categories, four full service food preparation categories, five mobile food facility categories, and six temporary food facility categories. Other categories include schools, bed and breakfast, catering, commissaries, and seasonal food facilities. The different fees are based on potential health risks, square footage, and the level of food preparation. Revenue is derived from nearly 7,000 food facilities in these categories. Other funding sources include: fees for service in plan review, re-inspections, consultation and training classes.

EMD contracted with a third party consultant who assessed program costs and revenue projections for all programs, including the food safety program. The consultant recommended a fee structure to support increasing costs associated with the food safety program enhancements.

BMP Survey Findings (Table 1)

Eleven of the fifteen jurisdictions that were surveyed recover their entire program costs with fees from permitted facilities. Additional fees for services, usually based on the hourly rate, include plan review, re-inspection, consultation, change of ownership, investigation, enforcement proceedings and training fees. One jurisdiction receives general fund money to offset program costs and three jurisdictions receive general fund money for public obligation activities such as public schools, charitable organizations and detention facilities. Four counties have obtained small grants for specific projects such as development of educational tools.

Restaurant fee schedules are not standardized and vary significantly with different departments. Typical categories are based on seating capacities, square footage, number of employees, and presumed risk. Table 1 shows the number of jurisdictions using the different fee bases. Fee categories based on gross receipts for restaurants have been used by one jurisdiction since 1992. For Sacramento, a county with a large and diverse group of businesses it may be difficult to determine gross receipts for new businesses, multiple-permits facilities, as well as hospitals and skilled nursing facilities. Auditing the businesses in a large county may be problematic for a public agency given confidentiality and proprietary information issues.

Establishing fees and fee structures generate discussions and public forums with Boards of Supervisors or City Councils and the regulated businesses on the relative impact of fees. A survey conducted by RestaurantOwner.com provides some perspective on the costs of opening a restaurant. Using the data from the survey an annual permit fee of \$900 amounts to approximately 1% of the average annual profit and 1/10th of 1% of the average annual cost associated with running a restaurant.

Table 1 RESOURCES: COST RECOVERY

<i><u>Theme</u></i>	<i><u>Responses</u></i>	<i><u># Respondents</u></i>
Revenue sources	100% fee offset	11
	Receive some general or state funds	4
	Receive some small grants	4
Fee structure	Risk-based	5
	Seating capacity	6
	Square footage	10
	Number of employees	2
	Gross sales	1

2. Workforce

Sacramento County

EHD employs fifty-two professional and support staff. Current staffing levels include a director, program manager, five supervisors (ES IV), thirty-nine Registered Environmental Health Specialist (REHS) and trainees (ES I II and III), two Environmental Compliance Technicians (ECT I and II), and four administrative support staff. There are five geographic regions: North, South, Downtown, Central and East, with thirty-two districts monitored by ES levels I through III, and a county-wide plan review section.

EHD staff are assigned field and plan review activities in food safety, recreational health, smoking control and tobacco retailers, childhood lead prevention, and other activities. Thirty-five full time equivalent positions are used in the food safety program for plan review, inspections, and complaint investigations. The California Retail Food Code (Cal Code) requires that all enforcement activities in the food safety program be conducted by REHS or EHS trainees (ES classifications). The ECT I and II provide counter and phone customer service, review plan review applications for completeness, track plan review status, coordinate plan review application processing with applicants and other departments, schedule construction inspections for the EHS and process paperwork for temporary events. Six student interns work on short-term projects, surveys and inspections not requiring an REHS. Environmental Health consultants are recruited and used for training and special projects.

BMP Survey Findings (Table 2)

Whereas all program activities related to enforcement are required by CalCode to be performed by EHS or EHS trainees, four departments are using technicians in preliminary plan review activities to ensure that the necessary information is included, coordinating and processing paperwork for temporary events, and developing various

Table 2 RESOURCES: WORKFORCE

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Food Facility Duties</u>	<u># Respondents</u>
Use of REHS and/or EHS trainees	Inspections	15
	Complaint Investigation	15
	Plan review	15
	Foodborne illness investigations	15
Use of EH Technicians	Review plan review application for completeness	4
	Organize and track plan review applications	4
	Provide phone and counter plan review consultative services	4
	Process paperwork for temporary events	4
Use of Interns	Special projects	10

reports. Nine jurisdictions do not use technicians in their food programs. Ten jurisdictions are located near colleges and universities and use student interns for short-term special projects.

3. Information/data management and utilization system

Sacramento County

The current data management system employed is Envision, which was developed and is maintained by Decade Company for EH departments. It can manage facility information, billing functions, track inspection activities, facility violations, scoring, service requests, and complaints. Currently, an EHS records inspection information and violations on a paper report. After returning to the office, the EHS enters the data into the system. The inspection report is then scanned and posted on the website by the IT support staff. However, the IT staff are in the process of implementing a field inspection system. Inspectors will be using laptops or tablets in the field with Internet connectivity, allowing inspection data to be uploaded directly to the database and the website. Management reports are generated to determine the productivity, quality assurance, and trends of the food safety issues in industry as well as the community.

The Sacramento EMD website (<http://www.emd.saccounty.net/>) is quite extensive, providing a range of information for industry (including access to forms) as well as the public. Inspection reports, status of food facilities, color-coded placard results, closures and customer survey information are also available. The website also facilitates public outreach and education, increasing community and industry awareness about current environmental health issues. Bulletins, fact sheets, publications and department updates are also posted.

BMP Survey Findings (Table 3)

Three of the surveyed jurisdictions have been using a portable field computer system for one, four and eleven years respectively. One other jurisdiction uses a wireless PDA phone device. Four other jurisdictions are in the process of deploying laptops or tablets for field use. Three jurisdictions are considering having the reports automatically posted directly to the Internet from the field.

Although no quantitative studies are available, three surveyed jurisdictions that have implemented the tablet or laptop system have seen a significant increase in productivity and indicated that the costs associated with the automation of the inspection system were more than offset by the benefits. The jurisdictions indicated that the use of field computers not only saves time in the recording and storage of data, it also results in clearer, more complete recommendations by eliminating difficulties associated with the legibility of written reports. Both industry and EH staff seem to be pleased with the system.

One jurisdiction’s inspectors use a wireless pocket PC phone device to record and transfer inspection data and operators’ signatures for temporary events and other non-food related inspections. This jurisdiction does not have inspection responsibility for fixed retail food facilities. A portable printer is used to print inspection reports. This phone has a camera to take pictures for compliance purposes. It can transfer data and voice, surf the web, download emails with attachments and has GPS capability. The director noted that laptops were previously used, but prefer this device because of the lower cost (\$300 for device and \$40 for monthly service), multiple functions, and ease of use and transport.

Four jurisdictions are considering more ways to do business electronically (e-commerce) such as accepting credit card payments for EH fees, and issuing permits online. This should provide timely and efficient fee collection, as well as convenience for the regulated community.

Table 3 RESOURCES: INFORMATION/ DATA MANAGEMENT

<i><u>Theme</u></i>	<i><u>Responses</u></i>	<i><u># Respondents</u></i>
Innovations	Use laptops or tablets	3
	Use wireless PDA phone device	1
	Considering e-commerce	4

Industry Input

Cost Recovery

- Two Industry Group representatives have expressed concern, that there may be an inequitable fee burden placed on operators of small-volume food establishments
- Four of the Industry Group members indicated a desire to work with EMD to develop a more equitable restaurant fee structure, especially as it relates to smaller size/volume establishments.

Information/data Management

- Industry Group members interviewed are supportive of EMD staff using laptops or tablets in the field and believe that this practice will improve efficiency of the inspections.

- One member suggested a delay in the posting of inspection results so that their upper management could be notified allowing for immediate corrective action to avoid the yellow placard posting.

PROGRAM SERVICES

The Sacramento County program services are provided in accordance with EMD's 2007-08 Work Plan. EHD has developed a Division Policy and Procedure Reference Manual that serves as a practical guide for the field staff. The intent of this reference is to achieve uniformity and consistency in field activities. This manual is updated as needed. Four of the EMD's essential activities are discussed below.

1. Inspection program

Sacramento County

EHD uses a risk-based approach to their inspection program. All fixed food facilities are evaluated and rated as high risk (three inspections/year), medium risk (two inspections/year) and low-risk (one inspection/year). Facilities are considered high risk if they provide full service food preparation, particularly with potentially hazardous foods. Facilities are considered low-risk if most of their products are prepackaged food and they provide minimal food preparation. The purpose of this approach is to reduce foodborne illness risk factors, and more effectively allocate department resources. During inspections and consultations, considerable amount of the inspection time is spent on items such as food handling procedures, taking food temperatures and observing employees' hygiene. Each of the twenty-nine food facility categories is assigned an inspection frequency based on risk assessment. Thirteen of these categories are issued placards after inspections.

Quality assurance in the inspection program is achieved through a standard training program, individual performance goals and training plans, standard management reports and individual inspection report review.

To assist operators with inspections, EHD provides various information and handouts on critical food handling issues and offers on-line information (see education and training section). EHD offers incentives for operators, including Awards of Excellence and posting of inspection results (see public awareness and access to information section).

BMP Survey Findings (Table 4)

Six jurisdictions have also implemented risk-based inspection frequency systems. Although no quantitative evidence was provided, the directors surveyed stated that this

One jurisdiction has implemented a policy of “announced inspections” once a year. Food facilities in the high risk category have the option of requesting one announced food facility inspection each year. This is especially valuable when the persons responsible for violation correction are present at the time of inspections. In conducting the inspection jointly, the operators will further their understanding of all the health requirements and their responsibilities in operating a food facility. Many issues can be prepared ahead of time by both the operators and inspectors so they could be discussed at length during the inspections.

In order to improve productivity, four jurisdictions request that their inspectors set target inspectional goals. Managers and district staff are held accountable to meet these mutually agreed-upon goals. In order to achieve these goals, productivity reports are made available on a regular basis for both management and field staff.

2. Education and training

Sacramento County

In 2003, EHD shifted to risk-based inspections and increased inspection frequencies for restaurants and other food preparation facilities. Educational programs were also implemented to promote a higher knowledge level among food service employees and management staff. The Mandatory Food Safety Education program was developed to provide food safety education to operators and employees of facilities with repeated major violations. Course offerings reflect the cultural diversity in the County and are offered in Cantonese, Korean, Punjabi, and Spanish, as well as in English.

The “How-to-Get-a-Green” class was also designed to train food facility managers on how to get and maintain a green placard for their establishment. The course topics include: safe food handling practices, how to avoid major violations, criteria for each of the colored-coded placards, posting requirements and re-inspection policies.

EHD offers consultation services for new operators and provides a packet of useful tools and information. Other food safety educational tools were developed by the department and made available in hard copy, DVD, and on the Internet. Compliance Assistance Bulletins were developed and distributed to operators to inform them of new laws or policies. Posters highlighting risk factors and how to avoid major violations are handed out at all the training classes and to operators during inspections and consultations.

A Retail Food Inspection Field Guide was developed and distributed to EMD staff and all the food facility operators. The purpose of the guide is to educate operators as well as to promote consistent and standardized inspections. The guide explains the placard system for the disclosure of inspection results. It also provides a reference list of key elements to ensure food safety, as well as examples of common violations of CalCode.

each business day to ensure that the public is able to access current information which is easy to read and interpret.

In 2004, EHD began issuing the Awards of Excellence Certificates to food facility operators who demonstrate a history of exemplary compliance. These certificates are issued in conjunction with Food Safety Education Month each September. The list of award recipients is placed on the EMD website.

To educate the general public on the subject of food safety, EHD has developed and posted on the Internet many informational articles such as Food Safety In Your Home and Consumer Protection Guidelines such as Handwashing Guidelines, Thaw Food Properly, Avoiding Cross Contamination, and Holiday Food Safety Strategies. A monthly EMD Update newsletter is posted on the website describing the Department’s monthly activities and accomplishments.

EHD staff worked with a large retail market during food safety education month to display food safety information at their stores. EHD staff offered food safety information to consumers.

BMP Survey Findings (Table 6)

Awards of excellence are promoted by four jurisdictions. One department is considering a permit fee reduction for award recipients as encouragement and appreciation of their efforts.

Table 6 PROGRAM SERVICES: PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION

<i><u>Theme</u></i>	<i><u>BMP</u></i>	<i><u># Respondents</u></i>
Website	Information bulletins	15
	Online videos	1
	Forms	15
	Inspection results	11
On-site public disclosure	Post letter or color placard	4
Public education/outreach	Online videos and interactive tools	3
	Partner with industry in promoting food safety	1

Based upon feedback received from three jurisdictions, online videos and interactive educational tools are user-friendly and effective in public outreach and education.

One jurisdiction was able to collaborate with a local grocery chain to print over ten million grocery bags with food safety messages. Some supermarkets have agreed to assist that department in promoting public awareness of the causes of foodborne illness by distributing thousands of Fight BAC brochures.

4. Plan Review

Sacramento County

EHD receives approximately five hundred new and remodel food facility plans per year. The associated work activities include consultation and field inspections as well as the actual review of plans. The workload is distributed among three Senior ES and one part-time senior ES. A supervising ES is assigned to the program. An ECT is used to facilitate the plan review approval process. She provides general counter and phone services as well as preliminary plan review services to ensure all information is included in the plans. Other duties include scheduling inspections, tracking the status of the plans and checking approved plans out to customers. The cycle time is approximately fifteen business days. Expedited plan review is available for an additional fee and is done by staff on overtime.

The EMD website allows operators to access information about the plan submittal process and download plan review applications, construction guidelines and other pertinent information.

BMP Survey Findings (Table 7)

One jurisdiction is using pre plan review meetings to help applicants understand EH requirements and to explain the basics of the food facility design process. This meeting makes it more likely that submitted plans will be complete and may reduce the communication time between the applicant and the inspector during the plan review process.

Two jurisdictions are considering the implementation of a database system that allows applicants to submit plans electronically. To be effective, an applicant must have a compatible electronic system. This process, which would allow inspectors to review and make changes/comments to the electronic document and track any modifications, facilitates the information exchange between the applicant and the inspector. Comments can be made on the actual document and quickly sent back to the applicant via email or a website. This could save a significant amount of time when there are major plan deficiencies. It also allows for the electronic retention of vital records, which can remain with the permit for the lifespan of the business. District inspectors would be able to access the actual plans and also any comments by the plan reviewer, to minimize

problems arising from unauthorized changes. However, this system will have a high set-up cost including equipment and training. One jurisdiction is considering sharing the cost with the building department.

Two jurisdictions allocate the workload based on the company, types of facility and/or locations in an attempt to improve efficiency. Three other jurisdictions perform joint final inspections by the plan checker and district staff to ensure continuity. Two jurisdictions are offering plan check classes for contractors, architects, consultants, etc.

One jurisdiction stores all the approved plans in digitized and indexed formats to support the paperless office concept.

Table 7 **PROGRAM SERVICES: PLAN REVIEW**

<i><u>Theme</u></i>	<i><u>BMP</u></i>	<i><u># Respondents</u></i>
Efficiencies	Pre plan review meetings	1
	Workload allocation by type and location	2
	Plan review classes	2
	Approved plans digitized and indexed	1

Industry Input

Inspection Program

- Industry Group members expect the department to meet projected inspection frequencies given that the budget is based upon achieving the projected workload.

Public Awareness

- A member of the Industry Group suggested that the list of award-winning recipients be given to the Group members so they could notify and congratulate the operators before the list goes public.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

1. Staff Training

Sacramento County

In spring, 2007, all EHD field staff and managers attended an extensive training program for the implementation of the new CalCode. This was an important step in preparing the EHD staff to effectively enforce the new code and to assist the operators to achieve compliance with it. Several non-technical trainings were also provided during the past year such as: effective management, verbal and written communication, customer service, workplace violence prevention, and defensive driving. A “standardization training” is regularly offered to management and field staff, with the goal of achieving consistency and uniformity of inspections.

Because of the difficulty in hiring qualified REHS, the Department is continuously recruiting and hiring trainees to fill vacant positions. An on-going training program has been implemented to educate the EHS Trainees in all EH program areas to assist with preparation and eligibility for the State Registration Examination. A supervisor is assigned to coordinate the training, including working with other divisions within the department.

BMP Survey Findings (Table 8)

All EH directors interviewed felt that there was a need for training in both the technical and non-technical areas. Because of the difficulty in recruitment, all jurisdictions are now spending more resources in staff development than in the past, especially on EH Trainees.

Table 8 STAFF DEVELOPMENT: TRAINING

<u>Theme</u>	<u>BMP</u>	<u># Respondents</u>
Competency	More resources in technical and non-technical training	15
	Mentoring program	2
	Special projects	2

The following areas were noted as needing formal training: Communicable diseases, epidemiology, risk communication, health education, problem-solving, project management, community outreach skills and techniques, and general interpersonal skill development.

As a motivational tool and to promote staff creativity, two jurisdictions encourage their staff to propose and work on special projects, benefiting both the individual and the department. Two jurisdictions have mentoring programs through which newer employees can learn from the experienced staff.

2. Recruitment and Retention

Sacramento County

Because of the statewide shortage of the REHS, employment opportunities are posted on the EMD website as well as other Internet sites. In an attempt to attract students and generate interest in an EH career path, EMD staff members have participated in the career and job fairs at the local colleges and universities and have developed a “Careers in Environmental Health” web page for the EMD website. EMD has successfully filled thirteen EHS trainee positions and two REHS positions since January 1, 2007.

BMP Survey Findings (Table 9)

Essentially all the jurisdictions surveyed commented on the fact that there is a shortage of qualified applicants for REHS positions. Five directors felt that their higher costs of living, especially housing costs, made recruitment more difficult. Since the demand exceeds the supply, EH jurisdictions must aggressively compete with each other for qualified applicants. Since monetary compensation is an important factor in the hiring process it's not surprising that the jurisdiction with the highest compensation rate was the only one with no recruitment or retention issues. This problem is unlikely to improve in the near future as REHS “baby-boomers” begin to retire.

Although high salaries remain an effective means to attract and retain qualified personnel, eight jurisdictions are addressing the issue in creative ways, such as: reimbursement of REHS exam costs and the biennial registration fee, paid attendance, including travel and lodging, at training and conference sessions, flexible work hours, access to state-of-the-art equipment and tools, and commitment to staff development and appreciation.

In an attempt to increase visibility of EH programs in general, two jurisdictions have developed and implemented marketing strategies to promote the profession, services offered, their value to the community, and career opportunities.

In California, all REHSs must obtain State registration in order to work in the food program, while those with out-of-state or National Environmental Health Association

(NEHA) REHSs are not considered “qualified” to be employed as REHSs in California. Other states such as Washington, Arizona, and Florida, accept applicants with the NEHA registration. In order to increase the supply of potential candidates in California, legislative changes may be desirable.

A future source of well-qualified EH professionals will result from the large number of retiring REHS “baby-boomers” who may be willing to work part-time or temporarily as needed. Hiring these workers, probably as contractors or retired annuitants, could result in savings to the County since there may be no need to provide a complete benefit package, and training costs would be minimal.

One jurisdiction implemented participatory management practices whereby supervision is significantly reduced and the teams develop their own plans, goals and objectives. Each team is responsible for its own revenue and budget and initiates its own hiring.

Table 9 STAFF DEVELOPMENT: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

<i>Theme</i>	<i>BMP</i>	<i># Respondents</i>
Recruit qualified applicants	Increase salaries and benefits	10
	Market EH profession	2
Retain employees	Flexible work schedule	10
	Home dispatch	1
	Mentoring program	2
	Special projects	2
	Participatory management	1

3. Staff Work Schedule

Sacramento County

EHD offers a 9/80 work schedule option for the field staff. EHD staff are home-dispatched two days per month as a means to increase productivity. This practice will likely increase in the coming months and years. EHD also employs temporary intermittent employees to conduct inspections on Saturdays. This provides for improved customer service as needed. Re-inspections can be completed during the weekend rather than waiting for the following Monday. These individuals also conduct inspections for weekend demand work at community events. The use of temporary intermittent employees also reduces the need for overtime compensation.

BMP Survey Findings (included in Table 9)

In order to maximize field inspection time, ten jurisdictions use other methods such as: 4/10 work schedules, flexible start and end time, going directly to, and returning home from, the field, and a variable workweek such as Tuesday through Saturday. One jurisdiction is using a home dispatch system, allowing the field staff to maximize their work time performing inspections. In this system, reporting to the office is limited to two times a week.

Industry Input

Staff Training

- Industry Group members appreciate that EMD inspectors receive standardized training to improve consistency and uniformity in the field, but feel that there could be improvement, perhaps through a process of departmental evaluation of the staff.
- The group members would like the department to ensure that their inspectors: are well prepared, have up-to-date equipment and resources, conduct inspections professionally, and accommodate business needs, particularly as it relates to the time of inspection visits.
- Members also expressed the feeling that the inspector should be a public health consultant more than an “enforcer” and try to create win/win situations in the compliance process.

COLLABORATION

Sacramento County

EMD recognizes the importance of determining the needs of the regulated community as well as the necessity to communicate and cooperate with groups who represent the interests of the public in general. Examples of those groups are listed below:

- The Sacramento Environmental Commission (SEC), established in 1988 by the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors and the City Councils of Folsom, Galt, Isleton and Sacramento, works closely with EMD on issues throughout the County, and supported the development of the Green/Yellow/Red Placard Program. Awards of Excellence were recently presented to honor County food facility operators at an SEC monthly meeting.
- The Retail Food Industry Working Group, consisting of EMD and food industry representatives, was established in 2003 to develop all aspects of food safety enhancements and implement the Green, Yellow and Red Placard Program and associated issues.
- In 2006, EMD contacted local media outlets (television, radio and newspaper) to develop a closer working arrangement and to determine how the media could assist with communicating issues relating to food safety to the public.
- Other collaborative efforts were undertaken through participation in the California Conference of the Directors of Environmental Health, California Environmental Health Association, National Environmental Health Association, California Retail Food Safety Coalition, Bay Area Food Technical Advisory Committee, local Chambers of Commerce, and the California Restaurant Association.

BMP Survey Findings

Not all environmental health departments have formally involved stakeholders in the implementation of the food safety program. However, those departments with close ties with outside entities, especially advisory committees and industry groups, agree that these relationships are very helpful.

Industry Input

Collaboration

- Industry Group members appreciate the open dialogue environment and team approach in addressing food safety issues as well as the opportunity to get involved with the fee adjustment process.

- This external input allows for pro-active resolution to potential problems, rapid identification of existing issues, and provides a valuable resource in problem-solving.
- There is also an increase in general goodwill that arises out of this process, reflecting the fact that safe and sanitary food service is a common goal of all concerned.

SUMMARY

In the process of conducting this Study, representatives of fourteen EH jurisdictions, four members of the Sacramento Industry Group, three food service industry managers, as well as the Sacramento County EMD management staff were interviewed at length. Based on the information received, the following assessments can be made regarding the Sacramento County EMD Retail Food Safety Program:

- EMD is administering a comprehensive and effective retail food safety program and all essential elements are present.
- Since 2002, several proactive and innovative program enhancements have been developed and implemented, many of which have been incorporated into the programs of other California counties.
- Work plan, and policies and procedures are adequate and appropriate.
- Productive working relationships have been developed with industry, advisory groups, media, and the general public.
- Fee structure allows for full cost-recovery and is comparable with other Bay Area EH jurisdictions.
- Data management system adequately addresses departmental needs.
- The department uses the Internet to promote public awareness and provide access to information on food safety.
- Field inspection system using laptops/tablets in the field is being implemented in an effort to improve efficiency and legibility in inspection reports with clear violation observations and recommendations for corrective measures.
- Risk-based inspections help maximize effective use of resources.
- Implementation of the Color-Coded Placard system with educational courses and Awards of Excellence has resulted in improved food handling and sanitary conditions in most food facilities.
- For cost effectiveness and efficiencies, EMD has employed ECTs to assist with customer service in all EHD programs including plan check and temporary food event programs.
- The staff development and training programs are adequate.

The survey of other jurisdictions revealed many similarities among the jurisdictions in overall cost recovery, workforce, data management, food safety inspection programs, education and training, access to information, plan review and staff development.

The survey also identified several innovative aspects and approaches to a food safety program that are included in this report. EMD should evaluate these innovative ideas for inclusion into their program. Given the lack of documented third party analysis of many of these innovative approaches, EMD should thoroughly evaluate the costs and benefits of these innovations.

Appendix A

AUTHORITY OF RETAIL FOOD SAFETY PROGRAM

- California Retail Food Code (CalCode), California Health and Safety Code (CHSC), Division 104, Chapter 1-13
- Food Drug and Cosmetic Law, CHSC, Division 21, Section 26000
- California Code of Regulations, Title 17
- Sacramento County Code, Title 6, Section 6.04

Appendix B

**SACRAMENTO COUNTY
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT**

Retail Food Safety Program Enhancement Study

RETAIL FOOD SAFETY PROGRAM QUESTIONS

1. What services do you provide in your food safety program?
2. What are the funding sources for the program and percentages of each source?
3. How are the fees structured and adjusted?
4. If there were funding available, what other services would you consider delivering?
5. Approximately how many retail food facilities are in your jurisdiction? What are the facility types, especially those with full food preparation?
6. Please describe your best management practices in determining and allocating your staff resources in the following areas:

Workload standards (number of staff, inspections per persons)
Inspections (frequency, average inspection time or program hours)
Self-inspections (what tools have you found to work)
Compliance assistance/enforcement
Investigation of foodborne illness outbreaks
Consultation and training
Inspectors' work hours (flex time)
Job classifications
Non-REHS employees
Staff training, development and motivation programs
Food safety training and certification
Standardization program
Grading/placard system
Temporary events
Mobile food facility

7. Do you have recruitment and retention issues? What innovative ways have you found effective in addressing these issues?

8. Do you have an EHS trainee program? What innovative ways have you found effective and efficient in training?
9. What IT tools are you using?
 - Information/data management system
 - Field inspection system (laptop or tablet)
 - Internet posting
 - GIS mapping
 - Data entry
 - Website
 - Street Trips
 - Other automation tools
10. Do you offer telecommuting? What efficiencies have you found?
11. Any thoughts on ways to improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the retail food safety program?
12. Any thoughts on future trends of the food safety program?

PLAN REVIEW (FOOD AND POOL) QUESTIONS

1. Please describe your best management practices in the following processes:
 - Plans submittal
 - Fee structure
 - Plan review process (new and remodel facilities)
 - Plan approval
 - Pre-final inspections
 - Final inspection/approval/issuance of permit to operate
 - Staffing resources
 - Expedited review
2. What is the approximate number of plans received per year?
3. How is the plan review workload allocated?
4. What is your opinion on assigning non-REHS staff as part of the plan review process?
5. What technological enhancements/tools are and will be used in your plan check program?
6. What are the funding sources for this program?
7. Would you support using the food program fees to partly fund the plan review program?
8. Any thoughts on trends and ways to improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of this program?

Appendix C

**SACRAMENTO COUNTY
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT**

Retail Food Safety Program Enhancement Project

INDUSTRY INPUT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Can you describe and comment on the services that you are receiving from the Environmental Health Department?
2. What other services would you like to receive?
3. Do you have any comments on the current fee structure?
4. Do you have any suggestions or proposed improvements for the program?