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## **What you don't know about restaurant scores can hurt you!**

By Andrea Martin, Manager of Gilmer County Environmental Health

Did you know that a food service establishment could score a 91 with one **critical** violation? If you don't **read** the inspection report, your initial thoughts might be "Wow, they scored great!" What you don't know is that they could have violated critical categories such as temperatures, food-handling, and personal hygiene. These critical violations can count as much as 9 points and are the "guts" of the food service program. Critical violations can certainly lead to food-borne illness! It is very important that you read the inspection report upon entering the facility. Once you know what the violations were, you can make a better decision on whether or not to dine at that particular establishment.

I would like to share with you the TOP TEN most frequently violated categories for Gilmer County's food service establishments during 2009. In knowing these violations, I hope to prevent food-borne illness and improve public awareness!

**1. Improper cooling.** If the food service facility is cooling soups, pastas, casseroles, salads, the food product is required to go from 135 degrees to 70 degrees within 2 hours. Then it is required that the temperature drop from 70 degrees to 41 degrees or below in 4 more hours. Failure to do so could lead to bacterial growth in the food product.

**2. Bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods.** What is ready-to-eat? Some examples are salads/produce, pizza toppings, sandwiches, deli meats, any cooked product, any ready-to-serve food, etc.... It is a State requirement that no establishment may use their bare hand(s) to touch food that is "ready-to-be-consumed" unless given a variance from the State Office. The principle of this is to prevent the transfer of bacteria and viruses from an employee's hands to your food!

**3. Lack of hand-washing.** Double hand-washing requirement means that if an employee goes to the restroom, they must wash their hands **before** leaving the bathroom, then **again** upon entering the kitchen. In addition, they must wash hands in between EVERY glove change, upon entering the kitchen after "clocking-in", after handling money, after putting up stock, and at any time their hands become contaminated. Momma always said "go wash your hands" before eating or from coming in from playing outside. Momma's principles definitely can be applied here!

**4. Poor Personal hygiene.**  
\*Employee drinks are required to be in a disposable cup, with a disposable lid, and a disposable straw. \*Fingernails must be clean and can not extend the tips of the fingers for chefs and food preparers. \*Jewelry is limited. Only a simple band can be worn on an employee's hand, such as a wedding band. No watches or bracelets may be worn by food preparers/cooks. \*Hair restraints are required for ANYONE who serves beverages, handles food, or prepares food. If a male has facial hair that exceeds 1/2 inch in length, a beard-type restraint is required! \*Aprons- employees may NOT wipe their hands on their apron in lieu of hand-washing. \*Employees must obey the establishment's employee health policy and report to management when they are SICK!

**5. Improper date-marking.** If a facility opens or prepares a potentially hazardous product (chicken salad, potato salad, casseroles, bag of cheese, *milk*, prepared pasta, soups, etc....) for later use, the establishment must label the food product with the prepared date. The food product is required to be discarded by the 7<sup>th</sup> calendar day. This requirement discourages the growth of spoilage bacteria and *Listeria*, a horrible bacterium that can grow at cold temperatures.

**6. Improper reheating.** All foods that go from a cold state to a hot state are required to be reheated prior to placing on the pre-heated steam table or in a pre-heated commercial-grade slow cooker! Quick reheating is critical in the prevention of bacterial growth!

**7. Improper chemical use and chemical storage.** \*Insecticides used in the facility must be “labeled/indicated” for commercial and/or food service use. If an establishment has an insecticide, it has to be stored separately from other cleaning chemicals (i.e. oven cleaners, sanitizers, etc....).  
\*Too much sanitizer (i.e. Clorox exceeding 100ppm for buckets or 50 ppm for dishes) is a violation. Too much is **not** better and too little is **not** effective. Sanitizer test strips should be kept handy to check for accuracy.

**8. Misuse of Gloves.** The worst thing to see when walking into a kitchen is EVERYONE with gloves on their hands. Gloves are only required when handling ready-to-eat foods. If an employee has to wear gloves for cleaning, they must discard the gloves after use and then wash their hands. Gloves give a “false sense of security” like a person is invincible against germs or cross-contamination.

**9. Improper utensil storage.** The establishment may not store cooking utensils in stagnant water in between uses. Also, they may not store knives in unapproved locations such as in between shelves, counters, sinks, etc.... Utensils must be stored clean, in the food product with handle pointed out of the food, in a running dipper well, or above 135 degrees or below 41 degrees. Proper utensil storage prevents cross-contamination.

**10. Improper cleaning of equipment, floors, walls, ceilings.** General cleaning is required for all of the facility and especially for those hard-to-reach areas (under grills, under refrigerators, under shelving, walk-in coolers/freezers floors, surfaces of gaskets of coolers/freezers, shelving surfaces, surfaces of equipment, inside the microwave(s), etc....). We encourage and enforce a “clean house.” We prohibit too much clutter in an establishment because these conditions can lead to insect/rodent invasions!

The food service establishment is required to have their health inspection report posted within 15 feet of the front door. If you don't see it, ask management to help you locate it. In addition, the score is required to be posted at the drive-thru windows where applicable.

Our food service scores are available to you at [www.nghd.org](http://www.nghd.org), or you may contact my office, Gilmer Environmental Health, directly at 706-635-6050.

In addition, the State EH website can be viewed at [www.georgiaeh.us](http://www.georgiaeh.us).