

Using Policy to Improve Food Service Quality in Six West Virginia Counties

Mid-Ohio Valley Regional Health Department, serving Calhoun, Pleasants, Ritchie, Roane, Wirt and Wood Counties in West Virginia

Abstract:

In November of 2010, the Mid-Ohio Valley Board of Health passed a policy requiring restaurants to have at least one person on staff with a food safety certification. Over the following two years, food code violations decreased by more than 50% region-wide. The goal of food service inspections is to reduce food-borne illness, and a reduction in violations of this magnitude is a significant improvement in system quality.

Background:

One of the most important missions of Public Health is to educate the public about disease prevention. It is sometimes difficult to do this during food service inspections, and yet we hold untrained food service staff accountable for their operation. To address this concern, the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department (MOVHD) developed a regulation that requires someone on staff at all food service establishments in the region to have a food safety certification (Serv-Safe or equivalent). We immediately started to see a reduction in food code violations.

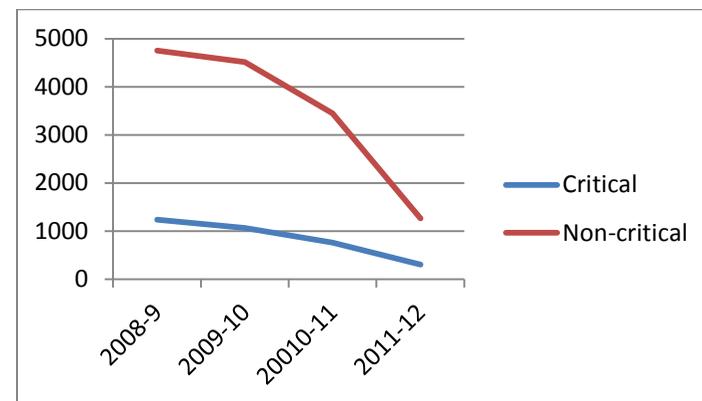
Results:

Food code violations

	2008-9	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Critical	1237	1065	757	305
Non-critical	4754	4513	3446	1262

Two year average food code violations

	08-'10	10-'12
Critical	1151	531
Non-critical	4633.5	2354



Conclusions:

The results of this effort demonstrate that with education food service establishments will tend to improve the safety of their operations. We have experienced a reduction in both critical and non-critical violations in excess of 50%; statistically a very highly significant drop.

Most quality improvement initiatives focus internally on policies or procedures in an effort to improve efficiencies or customer service. This project shows that the quality of the food safety environment can be improved by Public Health Policies, which should result in a reduction in food-borne outbreaks.