



Retail Virtual Inspections and Food Safety Checks

COVID-19 Response

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control
Healthy People. Healthy Communities.

How it started

- Food team leader was contacted by a contractor that needed a pre - operational/permit inspection. How could we do this and maintain social distancing when we were restricted from going to the facility?
- Contractor asked if we could do it via FaceTime.
- Team leader contacted program leaders and we decided to try it as a pilot.

Virtual Permit Inspections

- A virtual inspection SOP was developed that includes instructions on how to set up and conduct the inspection.
- The program developed disclaimer language to be included on the inspection form that would allow for any item not observed during the virtual inspection to be addressed at later on -site inspections.
- Developed an acknowledgement of the inspection email exchange protocol to use in lieu of signatures.



Food Safety Checks

- A virtual Food Safety Check Protocol was developed as a limited scope food safety inspection based on the virtual permit inspection protocol .
 - Positive features of a Food Safety Check:
 - Allows for social distancing.
 - Provides the necessary level of food safety information for most operations to conduct day to day business.
 - Non-graded, focused on compliance assistance and education.
 - Provides additional guidance tools via links in the form.
 - Takes approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Food Safety Check Form



- We created a form in our electronic reporting system that is distinct from our regulatory inspection form.
- Questions were designed to get the info on how they are operating.
- Narrowed down the items checked to the major risk factors; removed all Good Retail Practices.
- Questions are “conditional” and allow for the inspector to put in comments.

Food Safety Checks

- From April 6th – May 29th, 1666 food safety checks have been completed.
- Feedback continues to be positive.
 - Allows for an interactive and risk focused discussion that encompasses more than food code.
 - Provides food safety validation for promoting consumer confidence as the completed checks are posted on our web site as well as a list of facilities that have completed a check.

Lessons learned

- Don't be afraid to try something out as a pilot, if it fails, there is no long reaching harm. You will learn from the failure as well as the success.
- Using a pilot approach gives you the opportunity to fine tune the protocols needed for full implementation.
- Announced inspections can be a useful compliance tool. They are less stressful for the operator and can foster a more engaged relationship where the operator takes more of an active managerial role in food safety .

Future Uses?

- We've expanded the use to include change of ownership permit inspections by doing both a virtual permit inspection and a food safety check at the same time.
- We have a process in place for using video conferencing as part of a manufactured food inspection when needed to prevent lengthy personal contact.
- Other announced inspections such as follow up inspections seem like a good fit for virtual protocols . We will be piloting a process once routine inspections resume.



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