



# INFORMATION REPORT

<b>TO:</b> Mayor and Members Board of Health	<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b> CITY WIDE
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b> September 17, 2012	
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b> Food Safety Disclosure Program: Green Card BOH12020 (City Wide)	
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<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

## Council Direction:

At the April 2012 Board of Health meeting, Public Health Services (PHS) staff were directed to bring forward an information report regarding the current use of the 'Green Card' as part of Public Health Services Food Safety Disclosure system. This system was originally approved and implemented by Board of Health in early 2000 as a result of negative media attention concerning the food safety status of food premises in various Ontario municipalities, including Hamilton.

Provision of greater detail about inspection findings on-site was raised by Board of Health members at the December 10, 2007 meeting. The decision was made to revise the "Green Card" to provide inspection findings at the entrance to food premises as well as posting on the City of Hamilton's Food Safety Zone (FSZ) website.

This report discusses the use of the "Green Card" as a tool to advise patrons of the most recent inspection and that the premises met the requirements for safe food handling at the time of inspection.

**Information:**

**Food Premises Regulation 562 and Ontario Public Health Standards**

Food premises are inspected in accordance with the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) to ensure compliance with the Food Premises Regulation 562 under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA)*. As a component of the first annual routine inspection, the risk designation of the premises is assessed. A High Risk food premises in which a wide range of food is prepared and there are multiple preparation steps requires three inspections per year. A Medium Risk food premises which have a less extensive menu involving fewer preparation steps require two inspections per year. Low Risk food premises that generally sell only pre-packaged foods with little or no food handling on site require one inspection per year. Food safety inspections are conducted to reduce the possibility of food borne illness and to educate food services staff about safe food handling practices and basic sanitation requirements. Observations made at the time of inspection are recorded as Critical or Non-Critical violations of the Food Premises Regulation 562 (See Food Safety Inspections Standards - BOH 12019)

At the completion of the inspection process, a food premises is permitted to operate or ordered closed until corrective action is taken. "Green Cards" are removed from a premises where a re-inspection is required for outstanding critical items or a *HPPA* Order is issued. The "Green Card" is restored when re-inspection indicates that the critical items have been permanently corrected. Results of inspection reports for licensed food premises are posted electronically on the City of Hamilton's Food Safety Zone (FSZ) website [www.foodsafetyzone.ca](http://www.foodsafetyzone.ca).

This simple "Green Card" disclosure system was studied by McMaster Institute of Environment and Health (MIEH) and PHS to evaluate the perception of the general public with regards to the current "Green Card" system and their utilization of the disclosure system as a risk assessment tool.

**Industry Consultation**

In 2008, MIEH and PHS conducted a consultation with industry operators to solicit their views on the existing "Green Card". Nine hundred and seventy-five surveys were mailed out with a response rate (RR) of 16%. Findings revealed there was overwhelming 93% support on the part of the operators to retain the current system, as well, embracing the newly created web-based counterpart (Food Safety Zone). These findings followed a consultation with industry operators conducted in 2007 regarding the development of a web-based disclosure system as a secondary component for the disclosure of inspection results. At that time, there was some concern on the part of operators that non-critical food safety violations could be misinterpreted as critical infractions, which would consequently have an economic impact on industry operators. PHS addressed this concern with the establishment of the Hedgehog © Environmental system. This data

system allows for plain language and easy interpretation of critical and non-critical infractions. The data system is subjected to regularly scheduled Quality Control audits designed to screen for data errors and omissions in order to ensure reporting is as accurate as possible. (see *reference to consultants' report*).<sup>1</sup>

### **Public Consultation**

In 2011, MIEH collaborated with PHS in a precedent setting study. The purpose was to examine and evaluate the perception of the general public with regards to the current 'Green Card' system, and the utilization of the disclosure system by consumers as a risk assessment tool. The public consultation received over 1200 completed surveys, with both geographical and social demographic representation. The results show overwhelming support for the current system. Of those that responded (response rate of 83%), 76% had confidence in the current system. Furthermore, when asked about feeling safe when dining/shopping in Hamilton under the current system, 74% of respondents agreed that they felt safe (response rate of 82%). (see reference to consultant's report).<sup>2</sup>

### **Conclusion**

According to the study, both the public and industry operators have confidence in and overwhelmingly support the current Food Premises Disclosure system 'Green Card'. The current system parallels PHS current Operational Standards of '*permitted to operate*' or '*ordered closed*' until corrective action is taken and is clear in its meaning. The "Green Card" provides patrons with information about the premises' last inspection date and its status at that time. Detailed information regarding the inspection can still be accessed off-site via the FSZ website.

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#### References:

<sup>1</sup> McKeary, M. & Newbold, K.B. (2012), *Hamilton Public Health Services, Food Safety Program: Evidence based decision-making through and Equity Lens*. McMaster Institute of Environment and Health (MIEH), McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario

<sup>2</sup> IBID, McKeary & Newbold, (2012).