

Georgia Food Code Rules & Regulations Coming Soon

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As the entire Georgia restaurant industry is now aware, 2006 was a challenging year as the GRA and DHR had to find a way to take an imperfect rules making process and work together for the common good of protecting the health and safety of restaurant patrons. Although there were more than a few tense moments and disagreements over how best to accomplish the objective, the exemplary results achieved could not have been obtained without the development of a mutual trust. We believe that the DHR has come to view the GRA and its members in a new light and genuinely respect the insider expertise as well as pragmatic perspective the GRA brings to the table. We, in turn, have a new instilled confidence in the leadership of the DHR and a better understanding of their difficult jobs.

The transformation described does not come overnight, but instead reflects the efforts of the GRA's Executive Director Ron Wolf, GRA board members and selfless restaurateurs. What is viewed as the turning point in last year's arduous process was the extent to which the GRA was able to galvanize the support of the state's restaurant community and the solidarity of opinion demonstrated. When put to the test, the restaurants did not flinch when asked for the resources necessary to wage a successful campaign to educate both regulators and the general public.

The GRA's strong relationship with the NRA was also a significant factor as well, as the NRA likewise helped to lay the groundwork to demonstrate that the initial rules proposed by the DHR were out of synch and unrealistic when compared with the nation's other jurisdictions in addition to the FDA guidelines. The success achieved by this process has not been overlooked around the country as Georgia has been held up by the NRA and other state restaurant associations as the "model" for how to effectively work with the government agencies for implementing sound and practical guidelines in food safety.

As an illustration of this spirit of cooperation, in the Spring of this year, representatives from the Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR), state and local health agencies, and Georgia's restaurant industry, formed a first of its kind taskforce, to review Georgia's decade old Food Code, and bring it into the 21st century.

With an overarching goal of bringing Georgia's food code into greater alignment with the US/FDA Food Code (which itself, was updated in 2005), the group conducted a comprehensive, eight-month long review of the current code, resulting in what many experts believe is the most comprehensive and relevant food code in our state's history. One of the most significant features of the new code is its close alignment with the

US/FDA Food Code, which should allow the code to be updated as updates to the US/FDA Food Code are made available.

Over the next several months – leading up to the targeted implementation date of November 15th, the Georgia DHR, along with representatives of the states health agencies, will be focused on educating the state’s health inspectors on what has changed from the previous code, and what is entirely new to the code. One change that consumers will likely notice immediately, is the addition of a letter grade (A,B,C, or U) to the current numerical grade, on the inspection report. As contrasted to the original rules presented by the GRA, the letter grade will complement and not replace the numerical grade. Neither will the grade be required to be posted on the window of the restaurant establishment nor will there be unrealistic scoring and enforcement requirements as first imposed on restaurants. While not a change, increased emphasis will be placed on proper hygiene, such as the frequency of hand-washing, and food handling – both critical in the prevention of food borne illness.

Beginning this Summer, the GRA, in collaboration with the Georgia DHR, will be offering a series of 1/2 day seminars, statewide, to introduce the new code to Georgia’s more than 11,000 foodservice establishments. “To my knowledge, this will be the most comprehensive statewide effort, focused on educating and informing Georgia’s foodservice industry about the food code, ever undertaken,” said Ron Wolf “Our goal is to make the training so accessible, that every foodservice operator that wishes to attend, can do so, with minimal inconvenience,” said Wolf. The GRA plans to announce the Food Code training schedule by early June.

One of the key changes to the new code is the requirement that each foodservice establishment have a Certified Food Safety Manager (CFSM). To meet that anticipated increase in demand for certification classes, the GRA will be adding additional dates and locations to its current ServSafe class schedule.

Please be sure to keep an eye out for the GRA schedule for both seminars and ServSafe classes. These educational courses reflect a welcome cooperative environment in Georgia as the DHR and GRA stand together in working diligently to protect the safety and health of our patrons.

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Changes in Rules and Regulations, Food Service

Effective Date of New Rules February 13, 2007. There will be a nine-month implementation period.
Enforcement of New Requirements begins November 13, 2007

Below is a list of the major changes.

- Definition for Potentially Hazardous Food [.01(gggg)]

- HACCP Plans (required when process varies from rules and on certain processes listed in code) [.02(5)]
- Mobile units to have unit permit in each county [.02(2)]
- Mobile units that do not process foods and Temporary food service establishments – not required to have CFSM [.03(3)(b)1.]
- Demonstration of Food Safety Knowledge – One Certified Food Safety Manager (CFSM) required in each establishment [.03(1)]
- Exclusions and Restrictions for Ill Employees [.03(4)]
- Hand washing required after restroom use and upon entering food prep/Single Hand Wash required upon entering kitchen [.03(5)(c)2.]
- Fingernails must be no longer than tips of the fingers unless a glove is worn when preparing food [.03(5)(f)]
- Allowance for a Single Service Beverage Cup with Lid and Straw in Food Preparation Area [.03(5)(j)2.]
- Time as a Public Health Control [.04(6)(i)]
- Requirement for using Adequate Thermometer [.05(3)(g)]
- Storage of Serving Utensil for Hot Potentially Hazardous Food in 135°F Water [.04(4) (k) 6.]
- Food For Self Service:

New Food Products shall not be Mixed with Old Food Products on a self service buffet, unless [.04(4)4.]

All Unwrapped Foods shall be Disposed at the end of the Business Day or after a Maximum of 24 Hours after first being on Display [.04(4)5.]

- Minimum Hot Holding – 135°F [.04(6)(f)]
- Cooling Foods – 2 Hours 135°F to 70°F and 4 hours 70°F to 41° [.04(6)(d)]
- Temperature Changes for Whole Muscle Cooked Pork and Beef (145°F) [.04(5)2.]
- Date Marking Provisions for Prepared Foods Held Longer than 24 Hours [.04(6)(g)1.]
- Date Marking Provisions for Commercially Packaged Foods After Opening (7 Days if Held at £ 41°F) unless the Use By/Sell By/Expiration Date is Sooner [.04(6)(g)2.]
- No Bare – Hand Contact with Ready-To-Eat Foods [.04(4) (a) 1. 2. and 3.]
- Low Temp. Dish Machine – Flow Pressure Device Not Required if Pumped Rinse. [.05(2)(dd)3.]
- Food Service Equipment must be designed and built according to ANSI accredited certification programs [.05(jj)]Revised Instructions for Consumer Advisory Notice. [.04(7)(e)]

ADVISORY: CONSUMING RAW OR UNDERCOOKED FOODS SUCH AS MEAT, POULTRY, FISH, SHELLFISH, AND EGGS MAY INCREASE YOUR RISK OF FOODBORNE ILLNESS.

Note: Institutions must cook all foods to minimum cook temperatures. The Advisory Notice is not applicable. [.04(9)]

- Treatment for Raw or Partially Cooked Fish to Kill Parasites [.04(5)(d)]

-4°F (-20°C) for 168 hours (7days) in a freezer; or

-31°F (-35°C) or below until solid and stored for 15 hours in a blast freezer

-31°F (-35°C) or below until solid and stored at -4°F (-20°C) for 24 hours

- New Risk Categorization of Establishments, Inspection and Grading system using Grades A, B, C, & U based upon numerical score [.10]

Source: Georgia Department of Human Resources