County of San Diego

Department of Environmental Health and Quality

5500 Overland Ave. San Diego, CA 92123 ♦ (858) 505-6900 ♦ www.sdcdehq.org

OPERATOR GUIDANCE – SEWAGE BACKUP / SPILLS: HOW TO RESPOND?

The Food and Housing Division (FHD) of the Department of Environmental Health and Quality (DEHQ) is the local agency responsible for the oversight of retail food facilities. DEHQ-FHD protects public health and safety by implementing the Food Safety program throughout San Diego County. This guidance document will assist the Food Facility Manager or Person in Charge (PIC) minimize the time the facility needs to cease food service when responding to a sewage backup or spill, and ensure that the facility can safely resume operations.

PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW AFTER A SEWAGE BACKUP OR SPILL

Food facilities that experience a sewage release inside their facility must immediately stop food service to protect facility employees and the public from imminent health risks associated with raw sewage contamination. Your Health Permit may be temporarily suspended while necessary repairs are completed and areas contaminated by the sewage release are properly sanitized.

1. Immediately Stop Running Water, Discharging into Drains and Obtain Assistance from a Professional Repair Service

This will help stop the overflow of all sewage waste water from your toilets, backed-up sinks, floor sinks or floor drains. It is recommended to use professional assistance in plumbing services to make all necessary repairs and to remove sewage. Keep foot traffic away from the area to prevent spreading contamination.

2. Verify that all Waste Disposal Plumbing is Functioning Properly

To protect public health and safety, all food facilities must have operational plumbing in compliance with local plumbing codes. After necessary repairs have been made, test to ensure that all sinks, floor sinks, floor drains and toilets are working properly and are free-flowing to an approved waste disposal system such as the municipal sewer or an approved septic system. Facilities with an onsite sewage disposal system that is not working properly, must contact a sewage pumping contractor to pump the septic tank and haul away sewage to an approved disposal site until repairs can be made. Notify both, the Food and Housing Division (858) 505-6900 and the Land Water Quality Division (858) 565-5173 of the septic tank failure.

3. Thoroughly Clean and Sanitize All Areas in Contact With the Sewage

Ensure that all areas, including all food preparation and storage areas are properly cleaned and sanitized. Discard any food or disposable single utensils including to-go boxes which may have been contaminated by the sewage. Be certain to check any food and utensils stored near walkways that may have been splashed by sewage water during the repair and clean-up process.

Use a bleach solution of 100 ppm Chlorine to disinfect all affected areas including, but not limited to utensils, food-contact surfaces and floors. Floors, walls, furnishings, carpets, utensils and equipment damaged beyond salvage must be removed and replaced as necessary. Ensure protective eyewear, gloves and clothing are worn as needed.

4. Use this Checklist to Track your Progress

Do not call for a Re-inspection until all of the following items have been completed

- ☐ Eliminate all sewage effluent on the ground
- ☐ Repair all plumbing that resulted in the release
- ☐ Test all plumbing to ensure that it is working properly
- ☐ Clean and sanitize all areas affected by the sewage release
- ☐ Launder or discard mop heads and other cleaning aids that contacted the sewage
- ☐ Discard all food items contaminated by the sewage release including:
    - Exposed foods, bulk foods, fresh produce, meat, poultry, fish and eggs
    - Foods in porous paper, plastic or cellophane packaging that became wet (e.g. boxes or bags of flour, cereal, mixes, rice, salt, etc.)
    - Containers with screw tops, corks, crowns, caps or pull tabs that became wet (e.g. glass or plastic containers of ketchup, dressings, milk, mayonnaise, sauces and beverages)
    - Cans that are dented, leaking, bulging or rusted
    - Cans with damaged labels (cans shall not be sold without all required labeling information)

SAVE TIME AND MONEY

If you have not completed all items above, **DO NOT REQUEST A RE-INSPECTION**. Your Area Specialist will not be able to reinstate your Health Permit unless all the actions listed above have been completed. Repeat re-inspections will be subject to re-inspection fees.

AFTER-ACTION PREVENTION STEPS

The Food Facility Manager or Person in Charge (PIC) is responsible for training employees to prevent future incidents and for conducting initial and ongoing food facility assessments to ensure consistent compliance with food safety requirements.

Train your employees to routinely do the following:

- ☐ Prior to the start of each shift, ensure all plumbing, sinks, toilets and drains are working adequately
- ☐ Immediately report any observed or suspected plumbing failure to the Person in Charge

Remember that if a sewage backup or spill occurs at your facility, any affected areas, or the entire facility as necessary, must be closed to protect the health of your workers and your customers. To report a sewage backup or spill, or to obtain additional information, please contact the Food and Housing Duty Desk at (858) 505-6900.