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Press Release

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Cleanliness in the Workplace

With today's trend away from home-cooked meals, it is obvious that millions of Americans are eating out or picking up food to consume at home, and the numbers are climbing. Because our very health is at stake, that means we're trusting others who prepare our food to be as clean in their kitchens as we are at home.

When dining outside the home, we expect our food to be safe. We assume that it is prepared in clean surroundings by workers who are well groomed. Even though many restaurants strive for these goals and public health laws are in place, there is much room for improvement.

Foodborne illness, any human disease carried or transmitted by food, can impact a business in many ways. It can cause customers to stop patronizing a business, which hurts the bottom line. It can result in negative publicity and loss of prestige and reputation for the restaurant; lawsuits; increased insurance premiums; and employee morale problems.

National Restaurant Association figures show that a foodborne-illness outbreak can cost an establishment thousands of dollars. A worse case scenario is restaurant closure.

According to The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), defines an outbreak of foodborne illness as "an incident in which two or more people experience the same illness after eating the same food." Also, "a foodborne illness is confirmed when laboratory analysis shows that a specific food is the source of the illness".

Foodborne illness is commonly caused by failure to properly cool foods, failure to cook and hold foods at the proper temperature, and poor personal hygiene.

Good personal hygiene by food service workers is fundamental and cannot be overemphasized. Simply washing hands with soap and warm water can prevent many foodborne illnesses. Employees who sneeze or cough on or near food certainly catches your attention when you are dining out or picking up food.

Employees who touch or scratch sores, cuts or boils and then touch food is not only unappetizing to imagine, but unhealthy. When servers carry trays of food on their

shoulders, there is an opportunity for uncovered food to come into contact with their hair, another avenue for contamination.

The Hepatitis A virus outbreak that occurred several years ago, can happen again and can happen anywhere.

The NRA reports that Hepatitis A virus is spread from a source of human intestinal and urinary tracts or contaminated water. Outbreaks can occur in contaminated water, ice, shellfish, salads, cold cuts, sandwiches, fruits, fruit juices, milk, milk products, vegetables or any food that does not receive a further heat treatment.

People who are at high risk for foodborne illness include young children, pregnant women, the elderly and those with weakened immune systems.

To prevent many of these foodborne illnesses, the employer must carefully train employees in food-safety training as well as constantly monitor and reinforce food-safety principles in their establishment. Restaurants also must do business with reputable and reliable suppliers to help avoid receiving contaminated foods.