

Comments from the Inspector on Consumption of Raw and Undercooked Animal Foods

Food Safety Team, USAF School of Aerospace Medicine

The Food Code says in section 3-603.11 that if a food facility serves a raw or undercooked animal food (such as raw oysters, medium or medium rare hamburgers, eggs over easy, etc.), the customers must be advised about the increased risk of becoming sick from consuming that food. Consumers also need to know when a raw or undercooked animal food is used as an ingredient in a ready-to-eat food, such as using raw eggs to prepare Caesar salads. This requirement is similar to what the tobacco industry does labeling packages of cigarettes informing the consumer that smoking will increase the risk of developing cancer and other illnesses.

In the case of raw food, this information is especially important for consumers that may have a weak immune system, such as children, the elderly, and people that are already ill. One way that you can provide this information to your customers is by placing an advisory note in the menu making reference to the undercooked food items, for example: "This item is raw or partially cooked and can increase your risk of illness."

As with the tobacco industry, this consumer advisory probably will not give the food industry complete protection against any possible litigation resulting from a foodborne illness, but it will help reduce liability. And what it is more important, it may help prevent illnesses by assisting consumers to make more educated decisions about their food choices.

For more information, contact your base Public health office at 6-1225. Or contact the Food Safety Team at the USAF School of Aerospace Medicine (Brooks AFB, TX), at (210) 536-2058 –DSN 240-2058- or E-mail a message to jose.diaz@mirage.brooks.af.mil