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Inspectors work to keep restaurants safe

(continued from page 1)

"A lot of times when the person is made aware of the situation, then the situation gets taken care of," Jefferson says. "It's like your mother prodding you to clean up your room."

Jefferson says that if the person does not respond to the verbal warning, he is sent a letter describing the violation and telling him he only has a few days to clean up the mess. If this does not work, the matter then is turned over to the city's legal department for further action such as a fine.

On another side of health department duties, a sanitarian must regularly inspect food and drink businesses, Jefferson says. These inspections occur about every six months, depending on the reputation of cleanliness.

Jefferson says the first thing inspectors do when they visit an establishment is to check to see if the building is in sound condition, if it is

clean and that there are no major cracks in the walls.

"Then we look at their food handling practices, which is really the most important part," Jefferson says. "People forget that. They will look at the building and it may be filthy to look at. It may be dark and they may not clean it very often, but they may have excellent food handling practices."

"This is more favorable than if you have a building that looks great, but they're treating the food like hell."

Some of the other items a health inspector looks at include food protection, hygiene, food equipment and utensils, water, sewage, plumbing, toilet and handwashing facilities, garbage disposal, insect, rodent and animal control, lighting and ventilation.

All these items are listed on a grade sheet inspectors use when they pick through a restaurant. Points are deducted for various in-

fractions with some infractions costing more points than others.

Jefferson says follow-up inspections within about 10 days of the initial inspection sometimes are necessary when a restaurant or bar has some serious problems.

"If it's a very serious problem we may come back in 48 hours," Jefferson says.

He says an establishment can be closed if:

- The personnel has infectious diseases.
- There is a lack of adequate refrigeration.
- A sewage backup problem exists in the building.
- There is a complete lack of sanitation for the food equipment.

"We usually don't have to close a place down," Jefferson says. He says fewer than 12 establishments in the county have to be closed in a given year. Although some places, Jefferson says, may have several major violations or many small violations, they can re-

main open if they cooperate with the health department.

"When they show that they don't want to work with us to solve the problems, then we would have to close them down," Jefferson says.

He says some establishments persistently practice bad habits which present a health problem and annoy health inspectors.

"Too many restaurateurs are appearance oriented," Jefferson says. "As long as they present a smiling face to the public, they're not too concerned with what else happens."

"If they've got \$5 to put back into their restaurant to modify it, they'd rather spend the money to put new tables out front than to rebuild a wall in the back that they can't clean."

He says the Brazos County Health Department receives about 150 complaints of food poisoning per year. A full investigation is launched if enough of those complaints focus on the same establishment, he says.

Law requires family homes to register prior to opening

(continued from page 1)

When there are four infants, for example, there may be either two children from 18 months to four years and no school-aged children, or one from each of these two groups, or two school-aged children only. But there must never be more than six preschoolers in the home.

Besides the six children allowed during the day, up to six siblings of those children can be watched after school hours. But no more than 12 children, including those of the caretaker, may be in the home at any given time. All of the possible combinations of numbers and ages are on the list in the book of minimum standards.

The general safety and well-being of the children is the major requirement, Eubanks says. In a registered family home, she says, there is no specified program of activities that each household must follow.

As Larsen says, the family home is just that — a home.

"I just treat them like my own kids," she says. "They play together and they know when it's time for their snack, their lunch, their nap. Taking in three kids gives me just enough time to spend with each of them, I think."

The other published standards of the department for registered homes include regulations

about health, nutrition, abuse (or suspected abuse from parents), toys and activities and discipline.

For the person who wants to take in more than six children, or for the parent who wants their child to have more children in his everyday environment, there is the licensed group day care home.

The group day care home provides care for from seven to 12 children under 14 years of age on a regular basis for less than 24 consecutive hours.

The standards state that the ages of the children must be aligned with the number of caregivers.

For example, with one person caring for the children, the number of the children is based on the number of infants.

If there are three infants, from 0-17 months of age, only three other children may be cared for simultaneously. With four infants, no other children may be in care.

The other established standards for group day care homes are much more extensive than those for registered homes. More detailed requirements are listed for space, furnishings, activities and transportation, as well as the basic standards regarding nutrition, sanitation and fire.

The group day care home is licensed by the government and is therefore inspected every six months, unless a complaint is being investigated or a follow-up visit is necessary after a standard was previously found to be violated.

For a more structured environment, parents can always turn to a licensed day care center.

Licensed day care centers provide care for more than 12 children under 14 years of age for less than 24 hours a day. Some of the centers in the Bryan-College Station area are listed as having a capacity for as many as 278 children, although this number must be based on the state-per-child ratio and available space.

Day care centers might handle the most children, but their standards are the strictest and the most extensive, Eubanks says.

For example, activities must be provided according to the children's ages, interests and abilities. A supervised rest period is required, as well as activities for small and large groups and individuals.

Day care centers also have a daily schedule which dictates the core of activities the center offers.

Daily menu meeting stringent nutritional standards must be worked out and posted.

Licensed day care centers are inspected every six months by the department, Eubanks says.

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