

The Virgin Islands Consortium

DOH Conducts Intensive 10-Day Training On Upgraded V.I. Food Code

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ST. THOMAS -- The Department of Health's (D.O.H.) Division of Environmental Health during the past two weeks conducted an intensive ten-day, risk-based Food Code training on St. Thomas, D.O.H. announced Friday. The training was part of the department's mission to safeguard Virgin Islanders' health and the quality of food served in eating establishments throughout the territory, according to the release. D.O.H. said the purpose of the training was to educate D.O.H. staff on the regulations contained within Act 6719, and to fully transition them into the newly prescribed processes involved with implementing the new law.

All thirteen members of D.O.H.'s territorial division staff attended what was described as a rigorous environment. The training was sponsored by the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA), D.O.H. said.

Workshops included comprehensive training on the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) food code, health ethics, professional food management, conducting food service establishment inspections, working with the newly developed V.I. Food Service establishment inspection forms, and negotiating and conflict resolution.

According to the release, the trainees gained hands-on experience with the equipment and supplies provided in their new environmental health "Go Kit". Sessions on the use of kit materials included thermometer calibration (instrumentation), infrared thermometer, the use of chemical test strips, thermo pop and other procedures that will enable the staff to carry out their day-to-day field activities. Also included in the kit were: hair nets, beard guards, flashlights, and rodent detector lights.

"This will be the first time the V.I. Code will be fully implemented in the field," stated Juanita Johannes, director of D.O.H.'s Division of Environmental Health. "Now that we have a fully trained cadre of environmental health professionals, we want to transition to the new code which will allow us to go beyond what was done in the past to safeguard the quality of food available to the V.I. public. As we conduct our inspections, we want to simultaneously educate the owners and managers of territorial food service establishments about the requirements in the new code."

The V. I. Food Code focuses on what is known as risk-based inspection, the release said. This type of inspection is looking for priority items that contribute directly to the elimination, prevention or reduction of hazards associated with food-borne illness or injury. These include cooking, reheating, cooling and hand washing.

Ms. Johannes added, "Within my Division, we have an internal motto. We want to be 'soft on the person, but tough on the issue. By that we mean that we don't want to put establishments out of business, nor are we closing them but we want to ensure there is no danger to the public and we want the establishments to fully understand what is required to get them into total compliance with the new Food Code."

As an example, Ms. Johannes explained that when the division finds a business out of compliance, the owner or manager is given an option. "We give them an option to take the money that would have gone to pay a fine for non-compliance, and instead use that cash to invest in the business and bring it up to full compliance. We give them a "grace period" to do so and we anticipate that by helping the business in this way, such infractions will not recur. The division does not want to close businesses. We want to educate the business owner about the items contained within the new V.I. Food Code."

The VI Food Code, also known as Act number 6719, is contained within Title 19, Chapter 25, Section 509. This new code represents the formal adoption of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration Food Code. It replaces the V.I. Food Code formulated in the 1970s, according to the release.

Establishments visited during the last two weeks of training were Beni Iguana, China King, China Express, Great Wall, Chicken and Bowling, Benito Burritos, Azul Café, Sub Way, Hull Bay Hideout, Stone House Café, Roy Lester Schneider Hospital Cafeteria,

Thirteen, Golden Dragon, Rosario Spanish Fast Food, China Fast Food, Saki House and Wok Express.

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