

# Homeland Security Alert: Food Protection



In December, 2010, Department of Homeland Security officials, along with the Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration warned of possible food contamination of salad bars and/or buffet in the hospitality industry. The threat includes the use of ricin and cyanide.

Basic symptoms of a poisoning by ricin or cyanide would be similar to that of food poisoning. However, 250 milligrams of either substance could be fatal to an average-sized adult.

How does the public become informed without negatively impacting economic interests in the hospitality industry? Local health departments/public health officials have been notified of possible threat and begin surveillance for reported foodborne illness and act swiftly to determine if it is an isolated incident or a terrorist attack and work closely with local, state, and federal authorities accordingly.

Provided for in the Food Code Law, a health officer or local health department may act on behalf of the appropriate state department.

## **The Food Code Law of 2000 (excerpted):**

Under Section 289.2101 **Powers and duties of director (MDA)**. (1) The director shall provide for the administration and enforcement of this act. **The director may delegate enforcement and administration of this act to certain local health departments** in the manner provided for in chapter III. (2) The director shall investigate complaints and initiate and conduct other investigations as he or she considers advisable to determine violations of this act.

**289.3109 Local health departments as authorized agents.** Sec. 3109. **Local health departments that are delegated authority by the director pursuant to this chapter are authorized agents of the director for the purpose of implementing and administering this act and rules promulgated under this act.**

**289.2113 Order to cease food operations; resumption; reevaluation; hearing.** Sec. 2113. (1) The director may order **immediate cessation of operation of a food establishment upon a determination that continued operation would create an imminent or substantial hazard to the public health.**  
(2) A food establishment ordered to cease food operations under subsection (1) shall not resume operations until the director determines, upon reevaluation, that the conditions responsible for the order to cease operations no longer exist.

**289.3105 Enforcement; delegation to local health department; exceptions.** Sec. 3105. (1) The department shall **delegate the authority and responsibility for the enforcement of the requirements pertaining to food service establishments** contained in this act and the rules promulgated under this act to local health departments meeting the program criteria provided for in this act and rules promulgated under this act. The local health departments shall enforce this act and the rules promulgated under this act and may delegate enforcement authority under an organization approved pursuant to section 2431 of the public health code, MCL 333.2431 (Public Health Code-Local Health Department Requirements.).

*Upon notice, the local public health department will be the first to perform a foodborne illness investigation by retrieving a list of items consumed, identify customers, and report of symptoms. Following review of the food items consumed and laboratory samples, the agent will be determined for swift diagnosis and treatment and the need for local law enforcement in the event of deliberate tampering.*