

SUSTAINABILITY CORNER

OCTOBER 2023

Performing an Internal Environmental and Sustainable Audit

Well-run food service establishments conduct periodic mock health inspections and use companies, or friends of the owners/chefs/managers, to act as mystery shoppers for the food and bar areas. This information is used to avoid negative comments during health inspections and to monitor quality of service, as well as the honesty, professionalism, and quality of staff.

The same thing can easily be done with an environmental and sustainability audit. We recommend that an audit be done in-house at least monthly with an outside company, or friends of the owners/chefs/managers, coming in at least every three to six months to bring in an independent set of eyes.

Just like mock or practice health inspections, it is best to have a form to make sure you are covering the key points during each inspection. Below are sample forms for front-of-house, back-of-house, and for the overall business. The best thing to do is to modify each for your own establishments based on the points that were raised in the previous nine training sessions.

The forms on the next pages are in a format of “Yes, Most of the Time, Some of Time, No.” You can modify it as appropriate for your food service business’ needs by making it into a different format, such as: Yes/No, True/False, A/B/C/D/F, 1/2/3/4/5 or any other grading scale you feel would be best.

Front of House

Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	
				Are servers giving out straws, water, and condiment packages only if requested?
				Are servers marketing the sustainability of your seafood or other dishes when they describe them to guests?
				Are you marketing your environmental and sustainable practices on social media, your website, and within your establishment on a consistent basis?
				Are you monitoring the food taken home by guests or scraped into the garbage to determine if portion sizes are too large?
				Do servers use common sense in minimizing environmental issues? For example, do they stop refilling water glasses for customers who are paying the bill and ready to leave?
				Do servers use the appropriate amounts of chemicals in cleaning their stations and tables between customers and at the end of their shift?
				Do servers know to marry condiment bottles and other table items to minimize food waste?
				Are reach-ins, cold-food displays, ice machines, etc., in front-of-house cleaned and serviced on a regular basis?
				Do servers close the doors for reach-ins, cold-food displays, ice machines, etc., in front-of-house?
				Are the thermostats for the HVAC, doors that open to the outside, and windows of a modern design checked frequently to minimize heat/cool loss?
				Are outside doors and windows kept closed as much as possible to minimize the use and cost of excessive heating and air conditioning?
				Do front-of-house managers ask vendors, utilities, and others to come in to do an energy, environment, or sustainable review of the front-of-house operations?
				Do front-of-house managers work with other local businesses, such as wine makers, beer makers, local farms, or local cattle/chicken/pig/lamb producers to do a special feature event at your location to promote sales, bring in new customers, and teach about sustainability?
				When clearing tables, does your staff place items in the appropriate recycle containers and compost containers?
				Do the front-of-house managers work to reduce excessive amounts of packing that go into to-go orders and train the staff on how to minimize this waste of money and damage to the environment?

Back of House

Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	
				Are broilers, salamanders, ovens, burners, kettles, combis, cook tops, flat tops, grills, and other cooking equipment turned off and only at temperature when needed for efficient operation?
				Are the thermostats and seals on the doors around reach-ins, walk-ins, freezers, cold wells, etc., checked regularly to make sure they are working correctly?
				Are the hood grills cleaned regularly to minimize heat and humidity in the kitchen (which minimizes air conditioning use)?
				Is all hot and cold equipment cleaned regularly and serviced on a fixed schedule to minimize the amount of energy being used by each machine?
				Are the light fixtures energy efficient, modern, and well-maintained to minimize electricity use?
				Is FIFO used correctly to minimize food waste?
				Have managers, chefs, and purchasers worked with your vendors about purchasing more environmentally friendly options?
				Have managers, chefs, and owners checked with local utilities and the waste disposal company on ways to pay less money by minimizing energy use, putting less material into the landfill, and adopting more environmentally friendly methods?
				Do managers, chefs, and purchasers check the Monterey Bay Aquarium Sea Watch list, or other equivalent lists, when ordering seafood?
				Have you worked with your vendors to try to obtain products that are raised in an environmentally friendly and sustainable manner? When you do, do you remember to market these to your customers to increase sales?
				Are you careful with water and energy usages? For example, do you boil pots of water for no reason except to keep them boiling or run the dishwasher with very small loads?
				Have you had a professional check for leaks in all areas, such as faucets (including mop room and rest rooms), hand sinks, dishwasher, etc., and had them fixed promptly?
				Do you dispose of chemicals and grease correctly?
				Do you clean your floor mats, floors, and other kitchen items so the grease, degreaser, and the dirty water don't go into storm drains?
				Do you frequently look for ways to minimize food waste, minimize the use of gas and electricity, save money in kitchen production costs, and market these environmental efforts to your guests?

Overall Business

Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	
				Have you set policies and training for everyone in your food service establishment to show that all must work together to minimize the business' impacts on the environment?
				Have you shown your staff that participating in environmental-saving practices will be good for them, because it will help make more money for the business, which in turn helps make more money—and better job security for them?
				Have you made sure that each member of your staff, from dishwasher to chef, from general manager to busser, knows make you aware of environment waste that they see, such as dripping faucets, too much food being thrown out, etc.?
				Do you serve food that would have normally been wasted at family meals?
				Has everyone, particularly people who do food prep and get the front-of-house ready for opening, been given the tools, such as sharp knives or efficient ice makers, so they can do their job with minimal waste of product and energy?
				Do you have an incentive program for suggestions that will minimize the environmental impact of your establishment and at the same time increase the establishment's bottom line?
				Do you frequently examine your operation to see how you can minimize plastic waste?
				Do you frequently examine your business to see what you can do to minimize water use?
				Have you worked with the local waste disposal company to see what can be done to minimize your effects on the landfill?
				Are HVAC filters replaced frequently to minimize the amount of pollution and energy that it takes to run the machines?
				Is your water heater energy efficient? Have you thought about ideas to minimize its cost, such as replacing it with a new more modern unit or an on-demand unit, having it serviced, etc.?
				Have you worked with suppliers to see if there are more environmentally friendly cleaning chemicals, sanitizers, paints, etc., that you can use throughout your establishment?
				Do you offer incentives to staff to take public transportation to/from work?
				Does everyone in your establishment buy into the concept that you can help the environment, be more sustainable, and make more money at the same time?
				Do owners, managers, and chefs look for “teachable moments” to train everyone in your establishment and promote to your customers/guests that you are working to improve the environment and be more sustainable?