Information:

This report provides an overview of the Health Protection Division’s activities related to food premise inspections in 2005. Highlights of this overview are as follows:

- An average of 95% of the total number of routine inspections mandated by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) was completed.

- A high level of compliance with safe food practices continues to be observed in Hamilton Food Premises. However, compliance rates appear to have levelled off over the past three years suggesting that a new approach to inspections may be needed.

Details of these highlights are described below.

Mandated Inspection Completion Rates

The provincial Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines prescribe standards for the number of annual routine food premise inspections that health units should complete. These standards are as follows:

- High Risk Premises are to be inspected every four months for a total of three annual inspections.

- Medium Risk Premises are to be inspected every six months for a total of two annual inspections.

Low Risk Premises are to be inspected annually.
As indicated in the Executive Summary, inspectors completed an average of 95% of the total number of scheduled inspections required by the MOHLTC. These results are tabled below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Designation</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Total/Mean %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Required number of inspections*</td>
<td>2,028</td>
<td>2,138</td>
<td>1,039</td>
<td>5,205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual number of inspections completed</td>
<td>1,981</td>
<td>2,031</td>
<td>997</td>
<td>5,009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% compliance</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to routine inspections, 1,200 re-inspections to ensure correction of violations, and 600 inspections related to complaints and/or food recalls were conducted. Many of these inspections were in response to the recall of mung bean sprouts from a Toronto supplier that were implicated in a province-wide outbreak of Salmonellosis. During a two week period in November, inspectors visited over 350 food stores, restaurants and take-outs to ensure that this product was removed from sale.

PHS is pleased with the overall results of the food premise inspection program. It is anticipated that Hamilton will remain among the top five health units for compliance with mandated inspection rates. (Data for all Ontario health units had not been released at the time of preparation of this report.)

Hamilton’s success in raising and maintaining its inspection completion rates was also highlighted in the article Quality in Public Health published last year in the Environmental Health Review.

Compliance with Safe Food Handling Practices

While inspection data for the year indicate that compliance with safe food practices is high, it does not appear to be increasing in Hamilton food premises. The Division measures compliance by monitoring the ratio of re-inspections to routine inspections conducted and by tracking the number of convictions registered against premises.

The re-inspection/inspection ratio decreased dramatically between 2001 and 2003 when the Division brought its routine inspection completion rate up over 85%. However, since 2003, there has been no significant change in the number of re-inspections required. On average among high and medium risk food premises, one re-inspection for every four routine inspections is required to ensure compliance. A similar static pattern has been observed in the number of food premises convicted of food safety violations (14 in 2002; 12 in 2003; 9 in 2004; 9 in 2005).

* The actual number of food premises in Hamilton fluctuates constantly through the year in response to seasonal operations, new business start-ups and failed businesses. The number of premises cited in this table is therefore an approximation based on routine database audits conducted by Division staff throughout the year.
This observation suggests that new strategies for improving compliance need to be considered. PH06008, also submitted to the Board today, describes a study of inspection frequencies vs. compliance rates that PHS is conducting this year.

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