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Feature Article

Restaurant Hygiene

Home-cooked meal is everyone's choice. Unfortunately, with our fast-paced life style, not all of us are able to cope with the preparation of lunch or dinner for our loved ones.

We have little choice but to eat out, be it school canteens, the small hideaway eateries, or big food courts located near our workplace.

Issues such as quality and hygiene at time miss our mind especially when we are looking for food which is affordable and suits our taste buds.

But have you ever experienced losing your appetite even with your favourite dish at your favourite eatery?

Well, Rozy, a school teacher did lose her appetite, after buying her takeaway from her favourite restaurant in downtown Suva. She ordered chilli lamb with rice for \$7.50. She took her food to her office, **only to find a roasted cockroach hiding among the lamb pieces.**

Rozy was disgusted, annoyed and walked up to the Consumer Council of Fiji, office, demanding a refund of \$7.50 and necessary action to be taken against this restaurant.

The Council contacted the restaurant who agreed to refund her money without much fuss as the evidence provided by Rozy was sufficient to proof that a cockroach was in her food.

For the benefit of other consumers, the Council forwarded the evidence to the Food Unit at Ministry of Health and the health inspectors at Suva City Council for necessary action.

Rozy's case is just the tip of the iceberg. Council has come across 61 such cases in the last four years. Complaints range from restaurants being infested with insects, dirty and smelly. Hair, band-aid etc found in food. Restaurants serving cold, half cooked food and even leftovers from the previous day to their clients and consumers being subject to discourteous restaurant owners/staff when they draw highlight the issue.

When you buy food it must be safe to eat. It must be prepared in hygienic and clean conditions and to strict food safety rules.

With 2014 Hibiscus festival and school-holidays, many will be eating out so why not be alert what you buy.

The Food Safety Regulation 2009 Part IV “section (14) stipulates that all food business operators must ensure good hygiene practices at all stages of production, processing, handling, storage and distribution”.

No consumer wants to pay high price for low grade food which has been made in a grimy kitchen with used cooking oil and poorly kept ingredients in unclean utensils.

Consumers now can choose a restaurant on the basis of hygiene, just as they would on the basis of the menu, service or ambience. The Council is aware of the fact that the restaurant grading system is in place by the Ministry of Health’s Food Unit with the objective to protect public health through better hygienic standards.

The grading is being done from A to D, with “A” being excellent and “D” being poor. All restaurants that receive D grade will be required to meet the permissible standards. Now with the grading system, consumers should be able to know which restaurants are giving priority to health and hygiene.

It is a requirement that the grade provided to the restaurants must be displayed to allow consumers’ to decide where to eat based on hygiene standard. Poor hygiene in restaurants can result in food poisoning. So it’s certainly in consumer’s interest to know the hygiene status of their favourite food outlets to avoid getting sick.

Remember –food safety should be paramount with price and quality of service when it comes to choosing a restaurant.