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PRESS RELEASE

### **Alarming Hygiene Issues in Restaurants Nationwide**

A market surveillance conducted by the Consumer Council of Fiji (CCoF) has revealed disturbing number of restaurants failing to meet basic hygiene and food safety standards. The findings reveal a pressing need for urgent action to ensure the safety and well-being of consumers.

The Council undertook a comprehensive surveillance operation in June which covered 111 food establishments in Suva, Lautoka, and Labasa. The results were concerning, with almost 50% (55 out of 111) of surveyed establishments either operating without a valid Health License or displaying an expired Health License.

The surveillance also uncovered an alarming lack of adherence to food grading requirements, where 81% of the restaurants surveyed (90 out of 111) failed to display a valid Food Grading Certificate. Upon further enquiry, traders claimed that their establishments had not been inspected by authorities in order to ascertain a food grading. The Food Grading system allows restaurants to be awarded either 'A' grade (90%+ compliance to Food Safety requirements), 'B' grade (80-89% compliance), C grade (70-79% compliance) and D grade (Less than 70% compliance). Notably, authorized officers have the power to order the closure of establishments that receive a grade of 'C' or lower, depending on the nature of non-compliance.

Further analysis revealed additional critical areas where restaurants fell short. 69% (77 out of 111) of the surveyed restaurants were found to be neglecting the use of functioning food warmers for their cooked food. An even higher percentage of establishments, 80% (89 out of 111), lacked any form of insect control measures, leading to increased risks of contamination from flies and cockroaches. Additionally, 82% (91 out of 111) of the restaurants were seen with the presence of flies and cockroaches, posing serious health hazards to patrons.

Equally alarming was the finding that a significant portion, 64% (71 out of 111), of the establishments were in need of a thorough cleaning. Numerous restaurants were found to have staff members not wearing the correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as gloves, hairnets and closed shoes, which further jeopardized safety. Inadequate ventilation was also a widespread issue among the surveyed establishments.

#### **Head Office**

Level 5 Vanua House  
Victoria Parade GPO, Suva  
Phone: 3300792/3310183  
CEO: 3305864  
Fax: 3300115  
Email: [complaints@consumersfiji.org](mailto:complaints@consumersfiji.org)

#### **Lautoka/West**

Suite 4 Popular Building  
Vidilo Street  
P.O. Box 5396, Lautoka  
Phone: 6664987  
Email: [consumerlkt@connect.com.fj](mailto:consumerlkt@connect.com.fj)

#### **Labasa/North**

Level 1, Lot 41 Raza Properties Ltd  
Nasekula Road  
P.O. Box 64, Labasa  
Phone: 8812559  
Email: [colbs@connect.com.fj](mailto:colbs@connect.com.fj)

CCoF CEO Seema Shandil has expressed deep concern over these statistics, calling for immediate action. "These findings are truly staggering and they highlight a significant non-compliance issue within the industry. The CCoF is only an advocacy body, and it is up to the relevant enforcement bodies—Municipal Councils and the Ministry of Health Food Unit—to ensure that these restaurants comply."

The *Food Safety Act 2003* stipulates that every food establishment should be inspected at least once a year and assessed against a comprehensive list of requirements as set out in the Act. The Ministry of Health Food Unit is authorized to cancel or revoke the Health License based on their findings or recommendations provided by the Municipal Councils regarding the non-compliance issues found with establishments. The Council calls on these bodies to work collaboratively with restaurant owners and managers to address the identified concerns and ensure strict compliance with the law.

Additionally, the Council recommends a strengthened regime of inspections and enforcement. "Health authorities must conduct regular and rigorous inspections of all restaurants to ensure compliance and identify any violations. The results from these inspections, violations, and penalties should be disclosed to the public, thus empowering consumers to make informed choices. In relation to restaurants that are not complying, there must be swift and effective enforcement measures in place to hold non-compliant establishments accountable and impose the penalties prescribed by the Food Safety Act. We also call for restaurant owners and staff to focus more on proper food handling, sanitation practices, and good customer service," says Shandil.

Whilst the Council will continue with its market surveillance program, consumers are urged to report any food establishments which are not adhering to hygiene and food safety standards. Consumers can do this by calling the toll-free number 155 or email: [complaints@consumersfiji.org](mailto:complaints@consumersfiji.org). Alternatively, consumers can lodge complaint using the Consumer Council of Fiji App.



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**Ms Seema Shandil**  
**Chief Executive Officer**