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## POINTS OF INTEREST

- Common touch surfaces in dining rooms are not part of routine inspections.
- Are they a source of illness for customers?
- Lab analysis showed a significant level of coliforms on menus, condiment containers, and customer touch screens.

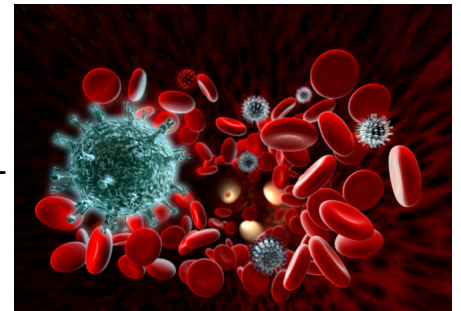
## Missed “common touch” surfaces

Trained Inspectors are effective at looking for “common touch” surfaces in food prep areas, those areas that are commonly contacted by multiple food employees, and can be a source of cross contamination. But what about dining areas? JoAnn Xiong-Mercado of the Marion Co. Public Health Dept. felt there was a potential for cross contamination among customers and told attendees at a recent meeting the Food Protection Committee about her research to document the extent of the potential problem, and whether having evidence could result in reduced illness risk. The research

was supported by the International Food Protection Training Institute. **CLEANING MISSED?**

JoAnn said she wanted to sample commonly used items in dining rooms that might not be part of a foodservice’s cleaning schedule. This included laminated menus, high chairs, self-service touch screens, restroom door knobs, and condiment containers. Establishments were chosen randomly from a list of larger sit-down restaurants and sampling was not connected to a regular inspection.

Precise methods were used in taking samples to assure consistency as much as possible and samples were not taken



*How many pathogens exist on common touch surfaces in dining areas?*

simply because an area “looked dirty”. Tests were conducted to detect coliforms since the objective was to determine the presence of

*(Continued on page 2)*

## What you should know about...

### EGG GRADES, SIZES

Before shell eggs may be sold, they undergo a “grading” process that illustrates quality. Assigned grades range from AA to A to B, after eggs are examined for exterior and interior quality

including the quality of the yoke and amount of air space. There should be no broken shells.

Egg sizes include Jumbo, Extra Large, Large, Medium, and Small. This is not the physical size, but the minimum weight of a

dozen eggs. Small is 18 oz., and Jumbo weight is 30 oz. Three ounces separate the size categories.

So the physical size may vary within the egg carton as long as the total is at least the minimum required weight.

## Missed “common touch” surfaces (continued)

(Continued from page 1)

possibly pathogenic bacteria. Could such knowledge help eliminate food safety risks?

### THE RESULTS

More than half of the laminated menus tested were contaminated (65%). High chair surfaces normally touched while adjusting them, showed 92% of all high chairs tested were contaminated. Salt and pepper shakers did not fair well (29% contaminated) but ketchup and mustard bottles fared worse at a 75% contamination rate. Over half of the soda gun / self-service touch screens tested positive.

Facilities at the Marion County Public Health Dept. were used to evaluate the samples.

### WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

JoAnn believes that sampling is a valuable tool that may be used during routine inspections to discover risk factors for outbreaks, or as an investigative tool to determine sufficient cleaning after an outbreak.

This can be a motivator for operators to improve cleaning practices and include common touch surfaces in dining areas. Food safety should be part of a facility’s design.

### JOANNA BECK TALKS SURVEY

FPC meeting attendees also heard from JoAnna Beck from the ISDH Food Protection Program. She explained a survey she’d started aimed at local health departments meant to determine if the number of inspectors is adequate with respect to their workload.

JoAnna has learned that there is no accurate count of food safety regulators or a consistent definition of “environmental health specialist” but the common view is that there are too few inspectors for the work. She said that many LHDs did not respond to her survey requests.

## Are cheese slice “singles” really cheese?

Are the cheese slices often used to make grilled cheese sandwiches really cheese? The technical answer is no. The FDA identifies cheese as containing at least 50% butter fat. High amounts of additives and less fat result in it being labeled a “cheese product”.

“Over 51% additives means the cheese is not “real” but is a type of “cheese product.”

Manufacturers add emulsifiers to bind fats and proteins tightly together allowing the product to melt evenly when heated. Fats may separate out of some traditional cheeses when heated making them less suitable

for melting. So the singles cheese slices will

be labeled something like “pasteurized prepared cheese product.”

As the Consumerist website points out, such products include synthetic ingredients, made in a laboratory, not from a dairy farm.

Companies can use the word “real” as FDA does not define that term specifically.

## Soy nut better recall leads to bankruptcy

The company responsible for the E. coli outbreak that sickened 32 people in nine states has filed for bankruptcy. Twenty six of those sick were under age 18, and all illnesses were traced to soy nut butter from I.M. Healthy brand, as reported in *Food Safety News*.

Even though CDC and FDA both named SoyNut Butter Company, the actual manufacturer of the soy paste was Kentucky-based Dixie Dew Products.

It is anticipated that Dixie Dew Products may also file bankruptcy.



The bankruptcy filings puts any civil lawsuits on hold.

*Food Safety News* also quotes the Marler Clark law firm that retailers that sold the products may face some liability. Some products were sold under names like Dixie Diner’s Club brand Carb Not butter

## What's bugging you . . . about bug parts in food

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) allows a certain amount of foreign materials or contaminants (defects) in manufactured or processed food, which sounds worse than it is. FDA says such defect levels, below which no regulatory action is required, "pose no inherent hazard to health." But, the agency adds, poor manufacturing practices may result in enforcement action regardless of food defect levels. FDA recognizes that it is economically impractical "to grow, harvest, or process raw products that are totally free of non-hazardous, naturally occurring, unavoidable

defects." This does not say that setting a defect level means manufacturers need only stay just below actionable levels. But it does say that inspectors will regard a food adulterated when defect levels are exceeded.



*Some contamination is allowed if it poses no inherent threat to health.*

Some of the low levels or contaminants that are allowed in food include insect filth (can include excreta, eggs or larvae), mold, rot, rodent filth (hair), pits, shell fragments, parasites, and more. The type of contami-

nant is related to the raw product being processed, and many pests live with the live plants.

Note that at the retail level, food should not

be adulterated and inspectors may make a judgement call as to whether an observation is actionable.

Details on these guidelines may be found in FDA's Defect Levels Handbook on its website.

## What is that red liquid in raw beef?

A common misconception is that the red liquid that sometimes appears in raw beef is "blood". But in fact it is not.

It is myoglobin plus some water mixed in. Most blood is drained during slaughtering. Myoglobin is

**"The red liquid is actually a protein, myoglobin, and not "blood".**

an ingredient of blood and is also found in muscle tissue. The greater the amount, the darker the meat will appear. Other meats like poultry contain little myoglobin so appear "whiter".



Storage temperature can affect the meats color as well. Often meat that has been frozen won't have much red color.

Cooking turns the beef darker, but regardless what the liquid is or its color, taking an internal temperature is the only way to determine safety.

## So, where does chocolate milk come from?

Misinformation about the source of food abounds. A recent survey through the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy found that 7% of people really believe that chocolate milk comes from brown cows. That number may not sound like a lot, but when translated to



*The color of the cow makes no difference!*

real population numbers, that equals around 16.4 million people. (So as not to embarrass any readers, chocolate milk is white milk with chocolate and sugar added.)

A similar survey found that as many as 20% of people don't know that hamburger is really beef, that French fries come

from potatoes, or lettuce and onions are vegetables.

Agriculture used to be readily visible to most people, but now instead of food coming from nearby, it may travel thousands of miles. A disconnect is especially visible with youngsters who believe all food comes from the local store, until otherwise educated.



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## FOOD PROTECTION COMMITTEE

[www.iehaind.org](http://www.iehaind.org)

### IEHA MISSION:

*To promote, preserve and protect environmental public health in the State of Indiana, and to encourage a spirit of cooperation among all environmental health stakeholders while serving its members in the regulatory, industry and academic communities.*

The **Food Protection Committee (FPC)** is one of four standing subcommittees of the **Indiana Environmental Health Association**. The committee meets approximately four times per year with dates and locations chosen by the members. Its focus is to discuss food safety related issues of interest to its members. While all IEHA members and guests may attend meetings, only voting members, as specified in the IEHA Constitution and Bylaws, may vote. Meeting information is disseminated by email. To be added to the email list, contact one of the co-chairs, or your IEHA chapter representative.

**FPC Co-chairs:** Jennifer Asbury, Lisa Chandler

**FPC Newsletter Editor:** Ed Norris

## Tidbits and morsels

### PACKING POUCHES PROTECT PRODUCE FROM PATHOGENS

*Food Safety News* is reporting that the Agriculture Research Service in Florida is being helped by USDA as it develops a pouch to make food safer. Chlorine dioxide has been used in storage rooms to sanitize produce but pumping it into a pouch is new. The gas can kill pathogens that may nest on produce surfaces. The credit card-sized pouches are made from a membrane that when packed with the product, release the gas at a suitable rate, reducing produce losses.

### FPC CHOOSES FALL CONFERENCE BREAKOUT SESSION SPEAKERS

The Food Protection Committee has announced its speaker lineup for the IEHA Annual Fall Educational Conference in September.

Monday afternoon will feature Elizabeth Bowman and Samantha Racanello from the Marion County Public Health Dept. talking about "Lead and Arsenic in Food and Consumer Products: Cultural Considerations."

Following that will be a panel discussion with Dr. Amanda Deering and Dr. Haley Oliver from Purdue, plus Lisa Harrison from ISDH's Food Protection Program discussing "Farmers Markets and Getting on the Same Page." Monday's agenda rounds out with Carrie Anderson, RD, from Purdue talking on "Allergens" and Krista Click with updates from the Food Protection Program.

Tuesday's food sessions will begin with Lisa Harrison and "Leading an Evidence Based Inspection." Kris Moore with the U.S. Food and



Drug Administration will share "FDA Resources for Local Health Departments." The afternoon concludes with Dr. James Hollis from the State Board of Animal Health discussing "Avian Influenza and Biosecurity." The conference dates are September 25 to 27 in Lawrenceburg, Indiana.