



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SECTION

EHS Circular Letter #2011-40

To: Local Directors of Health
Chief Sanitarians
Certified Food Inspectors

From: Food Protection Program

Date: June 8, 2011

Subject: Fraudulent Calls to Food Establishments

This letter is sent as a follow up to two previous letters (Circular Letters EHS #2010-35 and #2010-82 in response to an increase in the number of reports of fraudulent calls being made to food establishments. Over the past few weeks, the FPP has observed an increase in the number of the fraudulent calls that have been targeting bakeries and ice cream establishments. Many states have reported similar calls being made to food establishments across the nation.

Background

The caller claims to be from the state or local health department and claims that an inspector will be coming to the establishment to do an inspection on a specific date. The caller states that there is a new system in place and a five-digit confirmation code is needed to authorize inspections. The establishment owner is given a number to call to obtain the confirmation code. When the number is called, Caller ID indicates it is a Craig's List number. It is believed that this is part of a scam where the confirmation code is used to get past verification controls used by online services to set up accounts. If the scammers succeed, they get an online account that is not tied to their phone number, and can then engage in fraudulent sales that cannot be traced back to them.

Thus far the calls are the only contact with the establishment. There have been no reports of anyone impersonating a Connecticut state or local food inspector in an establishment however, some establishment owners have reported being coerced into obtaining the confirmation number and releasing it to the caller. Some have reported being threatened with enforcement action by the state or local if they do not cooperate.

Local Health Department Response

The FPP is requesting that local health departments inform staff and regulated food establishments about these calls. Notification can be by fax, mail, email, or in person during routine inspections. Only authorized persons should be allowed entry to inspect food establishments. All certified food inspectors should be reminded to properly identify themselves upon entering a food establishment. Food establishments are advised to contact the local police if they receive such calls and should be prepared to provide information such as time of call, phone number of caller, conversation details, etc. They should not give personal information or allow entry to anyone claiming to be an inspector without proper identification. If in doubt, they should call the local health department for verification. With regard to this specific situation, operators should be advised NOT to call for a confirmation number and NOT to provide any information to the caller.

If you receive information regarding a fraudulent call, please forward it to Joanne Houser of the FPP at joanne.houser@ct.gov so we can continue to track the incidence of the calls statewide. Provide the date, time, establishment name and address, the name of person receiving the call at the establishment, and a description of the call.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

CC: Suzanne Blancaflor, MS, MPH, Chief, Environmental Health Section, DPH
Ellen Blaschinski, RS, MBA, Chief, Regulatory Services Branch
William Gerrish, Office of Planning and Communications, DPH

410 CAPITOL AVENUE, MS#11FDP

PO BOX 340308, HARTFORD, CT 06134

Bus: 860.509.7297

Fax: 860.509.8071