

NEWS

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Cities Embrace County's A-B-C Restaurant Grading

More than two-thirds of San Bernardino County's 24 incorporated cities have adopted ordinances requiring eateries to post letter grades issued by County Environmental Health Inspectors since the grading program began on Oct. 1, 2004.

Grand Terrace was the first city to embrace the county's A-B-C grade-posting requirement after the Board of Supervisors enacted the program last year, and Hesperia is the most recent to adopt a grade-posting ordinance.

The County's Department of Public Health issues letter grades to all restaurants after inspections; however, only those in unincorporated areas or in cities that have adopted grade-posting requirements must display the grades publicly. So far, 17 cities have adopted posting requirements.

San Bernardino, Ontario, Victorville, Rialto, Adelanto, Needles and Twentynine Palms do not yet require prepared food establishments to post grades. San Bernardino has the largest number of restaurants in the county (531), and Ontario has the second largest (427).

"I look forward to the final seven cities adopting grade-posting requirements so county residents and visitors can dine with peace of mind everywhere in the county," said Second District Supervisor Paul Biane, who proposed and helped develop the County's A-B-C restaurant grading system.

Although some restaurants are not required to post grades, most of those that receive an "A" do display their score. In addition, scores for ALL restaurants are posted on the county's Web site, www.sbcounty.gov/dehs. The site has become extremely popular, getting about 7,200 hits a week.

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“The number of hits our Web site has received tells me people are very interested in knowing how the restaurants they patronize score during health inspections,” Supervisor Biane said.

Web site visitors can view all inspection scores for restaurants since October 1, 2004. Visitors also can fill out a restaurant complaint form online. A designated program manager reads the complaints and forwards them to the proper supervisor for action.

Many restaurant owners and managers have also become fans of the grading program because they realize an “A” is good for business. They also have come to realize that correcting deficiencies and requesting a re-inspection can improve lower grades.

Before the grading program started, restaurants were only required to post notices stating the county had inspected them and that a copy of the inspection was available for public review. However, Supervisor Biane and his staff discovered many restaurants did not allow patrons to review the inspection reports.

“The response we usually got from very courteous servers was, ‘I’m sorry but the manager isn’t here, and I don’t know where the report is,’” Biane said.

The current program requires restaurants to post a notice issued by the County Department of Public Health bearing either a blue “A” for a health inspection score of 90 percent or higher, a green “B” for scores of 80 through 89, or a red “C” for score of 70 through 79. Unlike letter-grade placards used in some counties, San Bernardino County placards also detail any corrective actions restaurants are required to take.