

**Public eating establishment
inspections**

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Introduction

Food safety is a significant issue for residents of Saskatchewan. One of the ways people contract food borne illnesses is by eating at public eating establishments such as restaurants. Public health inspectors monitor public eating establishments to protect public safety.

The Public Health Act, 1994 (Act) assigns responsibility for inspections of public eating establishments to the regional health authorities. Part E of this chapter sets out the results of our audit of Sun Country Regional Health Authority's compliance with the Act and related authorities governing food inspections of public eating establishments.

The Act and related authorities direct the conduct and frequency of eating establishment inspections as well as inspector qualifications. The authorities require inspectors to examine eating establishment cleanliness and sanitation, food preparation and storage, and food handling training for eating establishment staff. The authorities also define eating establishment hazard ratings and prescribe when actions are required by the owners and the inspectors to remedy any concerns found by the inspectors.

Background

Sun Country Regional Health Authority (Sun Country) is widely dispersed. It is primarily rural with two small cities, Weyburn and Estevan. Sun Country operates 28 health facilities and 17 public health programs for the 55,000 people within this region. Sun Country health region contains approximately 350 public eating establishments.

Food borne illnesses can sometimes result in long-term health problems. In two to three per cent of cases, these illnesses have long-term adverse consequences for the affected individuals and for the economy and society as a whole. Health Canada estimates that the annual cost related to food borne illnesses and related deaths is between 12 and 14 billion dollars. Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada estimate that every year between 11 and 13 million Canadians suffer from illnesses caused by food borne bacteria.¹

¹ http://www.canfightbac.org/cpcfse/en/safety/safety_factsheets/foodborne_illness/

Public health inspectors employed by regional health authorities inspect public eating establishments to ensure public safety. These inspections are intended to ensure compliance with all terms and conditions required by the public eating establishment licenses including food protection.

Our audit objective, conclusion, and recommendation

Our audit objective was to determine whether Sun Country complied with the provisions of the following legislative and related authorities for the year ended March 31, 2007.

- ◆ *The Public Health Act, 1994* (Sections 10, 16, 18 and 19)
- ◆ *The Public Eating Establishment Regulations*
- ◆ *The Public Health Officer Regulations*
- ◆ Public Health Inspection Work Guide²: Administrative Program Guideline No. 01 (Public eating establishment sections)

Our examination was made in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards and accordingly included such tests and other procedures as we considered necessary.

In our opinion, Sun Country has complied, in all significant respects, with the provisions of the aforementioned legislative and related authorities for the year ended March 31, 2007 except Sun Country has not met the target timeframes for follow-up inspections.

The Public Health Inspection Work Guide sets out required timeframes for follow-up inspections when regional health authorities find that an eating establishment has not complied with food safety legislation or related authorities. The timeframes vary according to the severity (i.e., moderate or severe) of the food safety concerns found.

Sun Country has a system to track its inspections. This system captures the timing and results of all eating establishment inspections within its jurisdiction. Sun Country uses this information to plan future inspections including follow-up work where it has directed eating establishments to address concerns it found during annual inspections. Inspections, including the re-inspections of public eating establishments with critical

² Prepared by Saskatchewan Health and the regional health authorities.

hazards are an integral element of Sun Country's efforts to prevent food-borne illnesses.

Sun Country completed 426 inspections during the year ended March 31, 2007 on the region's 350 public eating establishments with an overall inspection rate of 91% of the establishments.

We noted several instances where Sun Country did not meet the target timeframes for follow-up inspections. In 30 of its inspections, Sun Country found a moderate hazard rating. Sun Country did not meet the guideline requirement to follow up within six months for six of the 30 moderate hazard rated establishments. This increased the risk that the Region's residents could contract food borne illnesses.

- 1. We recommend that the Sun Country Regional Health Authority comply with the timeframes required by the Public Health Inspection Work Guide for re-inspections of eating establishments.**

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