



Report Highlights

Department of Health and Hospitals Office of Public Health

Regulation of Food Safety in Retail Food Establishments

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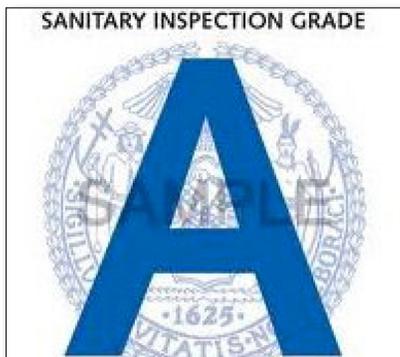
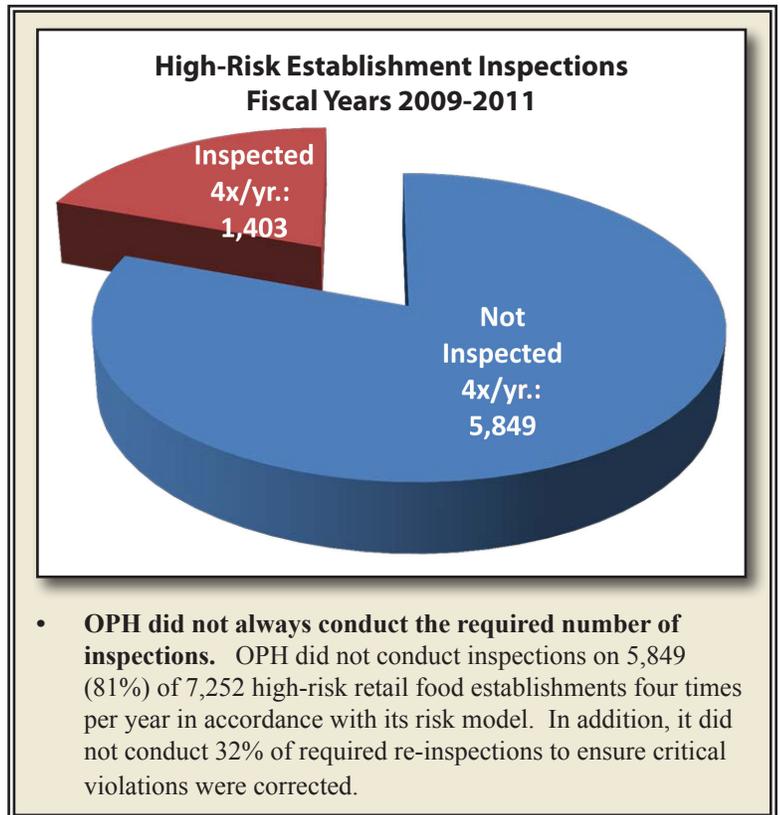
Why We Conducted This Audit

Louisiana's State Epidemiologist estimates that approximately 28,000 cases of foodborne illness are caused by retail food establishments annually. However, only 2,930 cases are actually reported each year, of which 498 (17%) are attributable to retail food establishments. This audit reviews the permitting, inspection, and enforcement processes that OPH uses to ensure the safety of food in retail food establishments.

What We Found

Overall, OPH's permitting, inspection, and enforcement processes need improvement to ensure the safety of food served in retail food establishments. We found the following issues with these processes:

- **OPH issued permits to some retail food establishments with uncorrected violations.** Specifically, from fiscal year (FY) 2009 to FY 2011, OPH issued permits to four (13%) out of 30 establishments with critical violations and 40 (33%) of 122 establishments with non-critical violations that were identified during their pre-opening inspections.
- **OPH rarely uses formal enforcement actions to address violations.** Of the nearly 450,000 violations identified from FY 2009 to FY 2011, OPH issued only four compliance orders to retail food establishments and assessed penalties totaling approximately \$1,300 for two of these compliance orders. However, OPH did not collect any of the penalties it assessed.
- **OPH's current enforcement process does not appear to deter noncompliance.** A total of 33% of establishments had at least one repeat critical violation from FY 2010 to FY 2011.



- **Inspection results not fully disclosed to the public.** Although Louisiana uses a website to post public inspection results, OPH estimates that approximately 3,140 inspections have not been uploaded to the website. In addition, the website does not contain all inspection results for each establishment. To increase transparency, OPH could calculate numerical scores or grades or post actual inspection results. Other states, such as Mississippi, Alabama, North Carolina, and Georgia, all use these methods to provide the public with easy access to inspection results. These methods may also help improve an establishment's compliance history. Because grades may influence the public's decision about where to eat, it may give establishments more of an incentive to comply.

**DHH agreed with most of our recommendations.
See management's full response in our report.**

View the full report at www.la.gov.