

WHO'S WATCHING



THE KITCHEN?

Inspections found lax at schools, health sites

BY SAM ROE
BLADE STAFF WRITER

Restaurants are not the only kitchens in Toledo not being inspected on time by local officials: Many school cafeterias, hospitals, and nursing homes have not been checked annually as required by state law, a Blade review of health records shows.

Among the places overlooked: the Food Service Center of Toledo Public Schools, which distributes 6 million meals a year to students.

It has had only two full inspections since 1990, records reflect.

"We have gone through a transitional period, and what we are trying to do is stabilize," said city health director Dr. Joseph Fenwick, who blamed staffing problems for the missed inspections. "I think the current [city] administration will help us stabilize."

Toledo's health department has been under fire in recent weeks following The Blade's four-part series, "Who's Watching the Kitchen?" The articles reported that city inspectors are not checking restaurants annually and are failing to go back to eateries to make sure violations — roaches, filthy kitchens, unrefrigerated food — are fixed.

In recent days, The Blade reviewed the health records since 1991 of schools, hospitals, and nursing homes — other "food service operations" that restaurant inspectors are required to check at least once a year.

Included were Washington Local

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and Toledo Public schools, six hospitals, and the city's seven largest nursing homes.

In 56 instances, or 14 per cent of the time, inspectors went more than 365 days between examinations.

One Toledo high school went 26 months before an inspector checked the cafeteria.

One South End nursing home went more than 25 months without a check.

One hospital's main kitchen has had only two, on-time inspections in five years.

"I'm very much surprised that that's the situation," said Harry Kessler, Toledo school board member. "It looks like a shake-up [in the inspection unit] is necessary."

The Blade review also found that when inspectors do find serious problems, a third of the time they do

not return to see that the problems were remedied.

The good news is that all schools, hospitals, and nursing homes reviewed by The Blade were inspected in 1995.

But in several cases, more than 365 days had elapsed between the 1994 and 1995 checks.

And no food-poisoning cases were reported since 1990 at any of the schools, hospitals, and nursing homes reviewed.

In fact, those places generally fare better in inspection reports than traditional restaurants. For example, it is not uncommon for a school to go for years without a serious problem in the cafeteria.

But concern remains.

"Laws are made for specific reasons, for protective measures, and I think [the inspectors] should comply with what the law states," said Crystal Ellis, Toledo schools superintendent.

"My main concern," said Dorothy Fletcher, president of the Toledo Parent Teacher Association, "is that

if [inspectors] are not checking [the schools], sooner or later some kids are going to come up with food-poisoning."

The Blade review also found that inspectors are not checking the school grounds on time.

By state law, they must check rest rooms, drinking fountains, locker rooms, and stairwells at least twice a year.

The same inspectors who check restaurants also check the school grounds. Problems range from broken toilets to crumbling stairs to exposed wiring.

But records show that inspectors have missed 34 checks since 1990. Whitmer High School, for example, has been overlooked by inspectors five times since 1991.

The most disturbing finding, though, may be that the food distribution center for Toledo Public Schools has not been inspected annually.

The school's lunch program works this way: Cooked food is trucked from a firm in Cleveland to the

schools' Food Service Center at 1025 Hoag St. There, workers assemble the meals — making sandwiches and salads, for example.

Then the meals are distributed to the schools. No cooking is done at the schools or the food center, only reheating and cooling.

At the center, records show, there were annual inspections in 1989, 1991, and 1992. Last year, the inspection was three months late.

And this year, an inspector showed up in early August, when the center was closed. She returned a week later, but a full inspection could not be conducted because school was not in session and there were no workers or food on-site.

There has not been an inspection since, records show.

Anna Brown, the schools' food service director, said she was surprised to hear that inspectors have overlooked the center.

"We are one of the best-run places," she said. "Our ladies do the best job keeping our place clean."

In the last five inspections, re-

cords show, no serious problems were found.

A nursing home that has not been inspected on time: Fairview Manor Nursing Center, 4420 South Ave.

Its 1992 inspection was two months late and there is no record that the home was checked in 1993.

Fairview Manor administrator Frank Swinehart said there are internal checks to ensure the kitchen is up to code, and he notes that state inspectors check nursing homes annually.

There have been no critical violations at Fairview Manor in the last five inspections, records show.

Hospitals also have been overlooked in inspections, but their report cards are also good.

"They are top of the line, as far as we are concerned," said city health supervisor Jim Fall.

Two of the last three city inspections at St. Vincent Medical Center have been late, records show. But there have been no serious infractions in the last five years.

Mary Bottoni, St. Vincent's direc-

tor of dietetic services, attributes the good marks to a well-trained and educated staff.

Plus, she said, "we built in a lot of checks and balances because we know we [are serving] a high-risk population."

In the wake of The Blade's "Who's Watching the Kitchen?" series, officials have sought changes:

- Mayor Carty Finkbeiner named a six-member panel to review the problems.

- The city's top restaurant supervisor was demoted.

- In an unprecedented move, the state announced it would conduct unannounced reviews of Toledo's restaurant inspection unit every six months.

When told that Toledo's schools, hospitals, and nursing homes also have gone unchecked, state health department spokesman Mark Anthony said the state would continue to closely monitor the situation.

"We have a job to do, and we need to make sure the local board of health is up to the task."

Dec. 28, 1995

Inspection agency earns passing mark in two state audits

BY SAM ROE
BLADE STAFF WRITER

Toledo's restaurant inspection department, under fire in recent weeks for not checking eateries at least once a year, finally has received some good news: It has passed two recent state audits.

But local officials conceded that some city eateries still are not being inspected annually as required by state law.

"We really don't have a handle on that yet," said Jerry Rotterdam, the mayoral aide coordinating efforts to improve the inspection division.

Timely inspections will not be guaranteed until next week, he said, when computers can flag restaurants that need checking.

Yesterday, state officials announced that Toledo passed two recent audits. On Dec. 1, state investigators reviewed city records of 25 local restaurants. Twenty-five more were reviewed Tuesday.

The results: All 50 eateries had up-to-date health inspections.

A state audit last year found that an estimated 40 per cent of Toledo's restaurants were not being inspected annually.

"We're pleased," said Paul Pancico, Ohio's food protection director. "[Toledo officials] have made vast improvements."

Still, the findings are limited because only 50 of the city's 1,600 restaurants, bars, and food stores were reviewed.

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State officials say they will continue the unprecedented action of auditing Toledo's department every six months for an indefinite period.

That order came from Dr. Peter Soman, the director of the Ohio Department of Health, shortly after The Blade's four-part series "Who's Watching the Kitchen?"

Published Dec. 3-6, the articles reported that city inspectors are not checking restaurants annually and are failing to return to eateries to make sure serious violations — roaches, filthy kitchens, unrefrigerated food — are corrected.

And in a follow-up article Sunday, The Blade reported that many school cafeterias, hospitals, and nursing homes also have not had timely inspections in recent years.

For example, the Food Service Center of Toledo Public Schools, which distributes 6 million meals a year to students, did not have annual

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al inspections in 1989, 1991, and 1992. Last year, the inspection was late; this year, it was incomplete, records reflect.

Those findings sparked Mayor Carty Finkbeiner on Tuesday to ask local health officials for a report on why schools and various health sites are not properly inspected.

Mr. Rotterdam responded in a report yesterday, saying that late inspections of hospitals and nursing homes "are part of the overall inspection problem," which officials have blamed on staffing.

"At this time, we just do not know if all the inspections have been completed," the report said. "This is a problem we are working on to correct."

The aide also wrote that inspectors are behind on checking school grounds. By law, officials must inspect the restrooms, drinking fountains, and locker rooms twice a year. The Blade review found 34 missed inspections since 1990.

City council OK's law requiring health unit to report on checkups

BY DAVID JACOBS
BLADE STAFF WRITER

Toledo council members voted 12-0 last night to require the city's health department to report to them each month on the number of restaurant inspections, the number of violations found, and number of violations corrected.

The ordinance, approved as an emergency measure, is the result of

■ Mayoral campaign kick-off?
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The Blade's four-part series "Who's Watching the Kitchen?" published Dec. 3-6.

The series and subsequent stories revealed that the city for years has violated state law by failing to inspect restaurants on an annual basis.

In addition, when inspectors find problems — such as insects, filthy kitchens, or unsafe food — they often do not return to ensure the violations are corrected, and some restaurants remain open despite repeated violations.

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The legislation directs the city's health director to provide the monthly restaurant report within 10 days after the end of each month.

Although not stated in the legislation, the reports also are to detail city inspections of food-service operations in hospitals, nursing homes, and school cafeterias. They also have not been inspected annually by the city as required by the state.

Councilman Bill Boyle sponsored the measure, his first legislative initiative since being appointed to council in September to replace the late Eleanor Kahle.

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Health

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"Every place they inspect, we want a report," Mr. Boyle said.

Dr. Joseph Fenwick, city health director, has supported passage of the ordinance and said providing the reports would not be a problem.

The legislation, which amends the Toledo Municipal Code, also calls for a similar monthly report on rodent inspections conducted by the city.

That is the result of a suggestion by council member Jeanine Perry, who said that rodent control had been an issue. The city was several hundred calls behind at one point, she said last month.

The restaurant/rodent measure will be presented to Mayor Carty Finkbeiner for his signature. The mayor will approve the measure, said his chief of staff, John Alexander.

The ordinance was approved as an emergency because it "is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, safety, and property," the legislation states.

Mr. Boyle asked that the first report detailing December, 1995, inspections be presented in the middle

Mr. Boyle also blasted the mayor for closing the meetings of the panel studying the problems.

of this month, and that permanent dates be set in the following months.

He also blasted the Finkbeiner administration for closing the meetings of the mayor's hand-picked committee studying the problems in the city's restaurant inspection unit.

"We will wait to see what they come up with," Mr. Boyle said. "So far, I haven't been impressed by the secret meetings being held."

In the interim, the reports to council are "a concrete step in trying to help the situation," Mr. Boyle added.

Committee chairman Arturo Quintero has defended closing the meetings to the public. He claims the secrecy is needed so discussions among committee members will not be interfered with during working sessions that include "brainstorming and planning."

Stickers in windows head list of reforms to assure diner safety

BY SAM ROE
BLADE STAFF WRITER

In a report aimed at cleaning up Toledo's restaurants and the city's troubled inspection system, a mayoral task force yesterday called for numerous reforms, including placing stickers in the front windows of eateries to show diners which ones have passed inspections.

The stickers not only would tell diners that a restaurant has been inspected within the last 365 days — an assumption they could not have made in recent years — but also that all serious infractions have been corrected.

Restaurant that refuse to correct violations, or are slow to act, would not receive stickers.

"It's just a level of confidence that the public needs," said Arturo Quintero, co-chairman of the task force. "The confidence has got to go up."

Mayor Carty Finkbeiner said he liked the sticker idea, "but I can't tell you how soon you will see them around town."

He said he would study the report for a week before making decisions on any of the recommendations.

The mayor appointed the six-member committee last month following The Blade's four-part series "Who's Watching the Kitchen?"

The articles found that Toledo has not been inspecting restaurants annually — a violation of state law — and that officials often fail to return to eateries to make sure infractions are corrected.

State audits also found problems — so much so that the Ohio Health Department threatened to take over the city's restaurant inspection unit. When more recent audits showed improvement, the state backed off that position.

The mayor's task force was charged with examining what went wrong and recommending how Toledo officials could right it.

After interviewing health officials, inspectors, and restaurant owners, the committee concluded that staff shortages, poor management, and outdated policies led to the woes.

The report was especially critical of the health supervisors: "Basic management practices were lacking throughout the administration of the program."

Among the report's recommendations, some of which are already in the works:

- A supervisor should be added to oversee restaurant inspectors. This position previously existed but was eliminated in 1991.

- Computers should be set up to



From left, Arturo Quintero, Amira Gohara, Lourdes Santiago, and Mary Gregory discuss ways to correct the problems raised in recent Blade stories on city inspections of restaurants.

Reforms

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track which restaurants need inspecting.

- Inspectors should use pagers and portable radios to ensure prompt response to complaints.

- The inspectors' procedural manual, which has not been used or updated since 1991, should be resurrected.

- City attorneys and the health department should draw up a step-by-step procedure on how inspectors may shut stubborn operators.

- Inspectors should submit to supervisors weekly itineraries of

restaurants that need checking.

Dr. Amira Gohara, the task force's co-chairman and an administrator at the Medical College of Ohio, also said the committee would like to have all restaurant owners keep a daily or weekly log of critical items, such as food temperatures. Operators who do not keep such a record, she said, could be cited.

But for diners, the most visible change would be the stickers.

"The stickers would be like the license plates for restaurants," said Dr. David Grossman, the health department's medical officer.

The stickers would not give the restaurants a letter grade, as is the case in some other cities.

Mr. Quintero said that the task force discussed such a system but decided against it because of the disputes it might cause between inspectors and restaurant owners.

"We'd have a lot of disagreement, and what we would end up doing is spending an inordinate amount of time on the disagreement and not enough time on what is important: seeing that we have healthy places to eat in."

Gus Mancy, association president and the general manager of Mancy's restaurant, said yesterday that members were receptive to the idea.

"The association feels it is a fair and very doable program, something that could be implemented in all of the restaurants in our city."

Burkett to oversee restaurant inspections

BY DAVID JACOBS
BLADE STAFF WRITER

William Burkett, whose legwork as Toledo's chief of environmental compliance helped secure a state prison for the city, was named to oversee the city's troubled restaurant inspection program yesterday.

As chief of environmental and consumer health, Mr. Burkett will guide several health department programs, including food-service inspections.

"I think he is one of the most enthusiastic and dynamic young men in the city of Toledo," Mayor Carty Finkbeiner said in announcing the appointment. "I think he will do a bang-up job."

Mr. Burkett, 35, is a registered sanitarian and a former Cincinnati restaurant inspector. He holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from Bowling Green State University, where he focused on biology and environmental studies.

He is to begin his duties in the health department Monday at a salary that has not been determined.

Mr. Burkett replaces Dale Hertzfeld, who had held the vacant position on an acting basis since last June. Mr. Hertzfeld was not among the candidates considered.

Mr. Finkbeiner indicated that Mr. Burkett will have sweeping authority to shape up the city's inspections of food-service establishments.

The Blade's four-part series, "Who's Watching the Kitchen," and subsequent stories found wide-ranging problems in the city's examinations of restaurants and food-service operations in nursing homes, school cafeterias, and hospitals.

The four-month investigation found that Toledo's health department failed to inspect restaurants annually, and often did not return to make sure problems were fixed.

Records showed that up to 40 per cent of Toledo restaurants were not inspected every 365 days as required by state law. State officials, in separate audits, failed Toledo's inspection program three times.

Mayor Finkbeiner said he expects Mr. Burkett to implement a more aggressive program to make sure inspectors follow up on complaints.

"I want them back within 24 to 48 hours of when they say they will return," the mayor added.

Mr. Burkett plans to continue pursuing three additional sanitarians for Toledo, computerization, and recommendations of a task force formed because of The Blade's series.

The suggestions included placing stickers in the front windows of eateries that pass inspections.

Blade is watching the kitchens' inspection results

(Restaurants- Blade- Who's Watching...)
BY SAM ROE
BLADE STAFF WRITER

Diners concerned about the cleanliness of local restaurants now will have some vital information at their fingertips.

Starting today, The Blade begins publishing the results of city

taurants. They will appear every Saturday in Today's log.

Listed will be the restaurant's name, address, the date of inspection, the name of the inspector, and all critical and noncritical violations. Critical infractions are those that must be fixed immediately.

If no violations are found, that

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Today's listing can be found on Page 14.

"We feel that publishing restaurant inspections will be a service to our readers who otherwise would have no way of obtaining this information," said Ron Royhab, managing editor of The Blade. "Many readers asked us to provide this information after

reading our recent series of articles on restaurant inspections. We are delighted to be able to do so."

All restaurants and "food service operations" will be included in the new log, except "Class 1" facilities, or those that generally serve only prepackaged food.

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Results

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Only routine inspections will be published. Under state law, most restaurants are required to be checked twice a year.

Toledo's restaurant inspection system has been under fire since December, when The Blade published the four-part series "Who's Watching the Kitchen?" It detailed how city inspectors were not checking restaurants annually and were failing to see that serious problems were fixed. The series sparked several reforms, including increased surveillance by the state.

Toledo health official Bill Burkett welcomed the newspa-

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per's decision to publish the inspection reports, saying the listings will educate consumers and restaurateurs alike.

But Gus Mancy, past president of the Northwest Ohio Restaurant Association and general manager of Mancy's Restaurant, cautioned that several variables can affect the number of infractions found, such as the size of a restaurant's kitchen, the complexity of the operation, and customer volume.

"A lot of these inspections are just a snapshot of a restaurant on a particular day ... and not necessarily a true picture of the conditions the whole year," he said.

Still, he said diners may discover how few infractions there really are at restaurants, and spotless establishments will be rewarded with good publicity. "The strong will survive," he said.

SAT APR 13 1996 TODAY'S LOG

Restaurants- Blade- Who's Watching... Births

Toledo Hospital

Peggy Grabarczyk, boy, Wednesday.
Nicole and Bob Gelardi, Toledo, girl, Thursday.
Roberta and William Sanders, Toledo, girl, Thursday.

Riverside Hospital

Helen Kille, Toledo, girl, Thursday.
Jodi Rosiak, Perrysburg, Thursday.

St. Charles Hospital

Eva and Scott Nickles, Toledo, boy, April 8.
Tracy and Gerry Symington, Toledo, girl, April 10.

St. Vincent Medical Center

Lashonda Davis, Toledo, boy, Thursday.
Roxane and Richard McCullough, Toledo, girl, Thursday.
Ebony Hughes, Toledo, girl, Thursday.
Julie and Scott Fornwald, Temperance, Mich., boy, Friday.

Flower Hospital

Karen and William Bixler, Maumee, girl, April 9.
Amy and Joseph Piorkowski, Sylvania, boy, April 9.
Carol and Dennis Durnwald, Perrysburg, girl, April 9.
Sherry and Robert Young, Maumee, girl, April 10.
Becky and Glen Stewart, Sylvania, girl, April 10.
Susan and Terrence Rood, Oregon, girl, April 10.
Rebecca Merino, Toledo, boy, April 10.

Restaurant inspections

Recent inspection reports for Toledo food service operations:

Subway, 4956 Monroe. Inspection date: April 3. Critical violation: Chicken on line 64 degrees. Discarded at time of inspection. Potentially hazardous food must be held at 45 degrees or below or 140 degrees or above. Others: Provide a metal stem type product thermometer 0 to 220 degrees; provide drain stoppers that hold in three compartment sink; provide test strips to accurately measure the concentration of sanitizer in three compartment sink; clean interior of cupboard on prep line and maintain clean; provide lighting in walk-in freezer; all pressurized tanks must be chained to wall or fixed equipment. Inspector: Rosemary Dressel.

Villa Pizza, 5001 Monroe. Inspection date: April 3. Critical violations: none. Others: Obtain appropriate test strips to accurately measure the parts per million concentration of sanitizer. Inspector: Jennifer Jennewine.

Papa Johns, 3392 Lagrange. Inspection date: April 3. Critical violations: Manual dishwashing technique improper (no sanitizer); Lysol on countertop — store toxic chemicals in areas designated for "chemical storage only"; toxic chemicals must be properly labeled. Others: Provide toilet tissue in men's restroom; provide soap for men's restroom; provide towels in women's restroom; do not store items directly on floor of walk-in. Inspector: Harold Parks.

Marco's Pizza, 5248 Monroe. Inspection date: April 3. Critical violations: none. Others: Clean all non-food contact surfaces of equipment as often as is necessary to keep free of accumulation of dust, food particles, and other debris (shelving — front counter, condiment holder, pizza oven and hood.) Inspector: Dressel.

Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, 740 N. Superior. Inspection date: April 3. Critical violations: none. Others: Keep the table-mounted can opener free of iron filings as shown; the inside of the dishwasher is to be kept free of mineral deposit build-up as needed. Inspector: Bruce Mason.

Little Caesars Pizza, 2600 Sylvania. Inspection date: April 4. Critical violations: none. Others: Clean all non-food contact surfaces as often as necessary to keep free of dust, food particles, and other debris; eliminate water in floor of sub prep cooler. Inspector: Dressel.

Lucas County Corrections Center, 1622 Spielbusch. Inspection date: April 4. Critical violations: none. Others: Refinish walk-in cooler floor; repaint table legs as needed. Inspector: John Neerer.

The Coffee Shop, 1622 Spielbusch. Inspection date: April 4. Critical violations: none. Others: Store ice scoop out of ice; bleach cutting board back to original white. Inspector: Neerer.

Shell, 429 W. Alexis. Inspection date: April 8. Critical violations: none. Others: Clear/clean back room (general organization); do not store items (towels, etc.) in hand washing sink; display current food service license. Inspector: Parks.

Mr. Philly, 3550 Executive Parkway. Inspection date: April 8. Critical violation: Tuna salad 51 degrees. All potentially hazardous foods must be held at an internal temperature of 45 degrees or below to prevent the growth of pathogenic bacteria. Others: Food items stored on floor in walk-in freezer. All food items must be stored at least 6 inches off floor to prevent contamination and facilitate cleaning; obtain an accurate product thermometer to assure maintenance of proper food temperatures; remove ice accumulation from walk-in freezer; keep single use containers and lids wrapped until use; single-service utensils shall face the same direction to prevent contamination; repair one compartment of three-compartment sink so it holds water to facilitate proper washing, rinsing, and sanitizing equipment and utensils; provide a constant supply of soap in women's restroom; also provide a covered trash can for women's restroom; provide a toilet paper dispenser for men's restroom and repair/replace inoperable mechanical ventilation in men's restroom; clean all surfaces of all hoods and replace all broken filters in hoods; CO₂ tanks must be chained at all times to prevent accidental tipping; provide a mop and broom hanger for the mop sink area. Inspector: Jennewine.

Al Ahmed's Steak House, 1923 W. Alexis. Inspection date: April 8. Critical violations: none. Others: none. Inspector: Dressel.

Yorkshire Banquet Hall, 4017 Lagrange. Inspection date: April 8. Critical violations: none. Others: none. Inspector: Parks.

Haukedahl Foundation, 4017 Lagrange. Inspection date: April 9. Critical violations: none. Others: Display 1996 food service operation license. Inspector: Parks.

Agency is dishing out inspection stickers to 1,300 eateries in city

TUE JUN 25 1996
RESTAURANTS - BLADE "WHO'S WATCHING"

BY SAM ROE

BLADE STAFF WRITER THE KITCHEN

Diners may notice a new wrinkle at local restaurants: stickers showing the last time the eateries were inspected.

Yesterday, the Toledo health department sent out the blue-and-white stickers to the city's 1,300 "food service operations": restaurants, country clubs, nursing homes, and any other place serving food.

Every eatery will be mailed a sticker showing the last time an inspection took place, whether that was last week or last year. Beginning today, only those that pass a recent inspection get updated stickers.

The stickers not only tell diners a restaurant has been inspected recently, but also that all serious infractions have been corrected.

"It will show people that someone was recently there to put them straight," said Bill Burkett, the city's chief of environmental and consumer health.

Restaurants that refuse to correct serious violations, or are slow to act, will not receive updated stickers.

The program will be voluntary. Restaurant owners can put the stickers in the window or in the trash. The city considered making the program mandatory, Mr.

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BLADE PHOTO BY JEREMY WADSWORTH



Bill Burkett: 'It will show people that someone was recently there to put them straight.'

Stickers

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Burkett said, but state law would not allow it.

He said he thought all restaurants would display their stickers; otherwise, diners might become suspicious.

The stickers will not show how many infractions an eatery has had, nor will they give letter grades, as in some other cities. Officials decided against a grading system because of the disputes it might cause between inspectors and restaurant owners.

The city spent roughly \$4,500 on the program, the money coming from restaurant license fees.

This morning, Mayor Carty Finkbeiner and city health officials will hold a press conference to

unveil the stickers. In a statement released yesterday, Mr. Finkbeiner said: "The sticker program is being implemented to assure the public of the safety of Toledo restaurants."

The program is one of several reforms sparked by The Blade's four-part series in December "Who's Watching the Kitchen?" The series found that inspectors were not checking restaurants on a regular basis and often did not return to make sure problems were fixed.

Records showed up to 40 per cent of local eateries were not inspected every 365 days, as required at the time by state law.

Now, Mr. Burkett said, all restaurants are being checked at least once a year.

But new state rules require even more inspections; some eateries now must be checked three times a year.

City restaurant inspections given positive reviews

RESTAURANTS - BLADE "Who's Watching THE Kitchen?"

BY GEORGE J. TANBER

BLADE STAFF WRITER

The state has given the Toledo health department's restaurant-inspection program high marks in a recent review of its performance.

As a result, the state will conduct fewer program reviews.

"It was no surprise to me," said Bill Burkett, the Toledo health department's chief of environmental and consumer health. "We've been performing our own in-house audits ... and we've been in pretty good shape the last couple of months. We felt confident we were going to be just fine."

The department has been criticized since a four-part series, "Who's Watching the Kitchen?" was published in The Blade in December. Blade reporters found inspectors had failed to perform inspections of up to 40 per cent of the city's restaurants.

When the inspectors did uncover problems, nearly half of the time they did not return to see whether

■ Toledo council is scheduled to vote today on staggered terms for members. Story on Page 14.

the problems were corrected. Some restaurants repeated the same violations year after year.

The articles sparked many changes, including the demotion of Toledo's top restaurant inspection supervisor and increased state oversight.

Soon after the series was published, the state conducted a review of the city's inspection program. The evaluation concluded that:

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"Due to past problems with this program, the director of health will conduct frequent surveys of the Toledo city health department food service program until it is assured that you will continue to maintain the program at a level of quality needed to meet the criteria for approval."

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The state decided it would conduct similar reviews every six months. Typically, such reviews are conducted once every year or two, Mr. Burkett said.

The most recent follow-up inspection by the state gave Toledo excellent ratings for inspection frequency and for plan review of food service operations.

"Based upon the results of this resurvey, the Toledo city health department is maintaining

the Ohio Department of Health's criteria for approval," the state review concluded.

Toledo's health department has said that its restaurant inspection unit is understaffed. In April, the unit added a member, bringing its total to 10. But one of the 10 transferred out of the department in July, leaving the unit understaffed again, Mr. Burkett said.

The unit does about 2,800 inspections a year at 1,300 restaurants, he said. "We also do grocery stores, schools, liquor permit inspections, and massage and bath parlors."

Dr. Joseph Fenwick, city health commissioner, has asked the mayor for permission to hire an inspector, Mr. Burkett said, but the city has frozen all hiring, even though the inspection

unit is budgeted for 10 inspectors.

One alternative would be to transfer someone from the department's environmental unit into the inspection unit. But the environmental unit is understaffed by two people.

"We would be short three" employees, Mr. Burkett said. "It would be impossible."

One possibility, he said, would be to change the city's inspection visits at the grocery departments of food stores from once every 12 months to once every 18 months.

Mr. Burkett said Toledo inspectors might collaborate with state agriculture department inspectors, who check grocery stores, to try to reduce the city's workload.