CNDH: Food Safety Certification

You may think the Center for Nutrition, Diet and Health is all about food and nutrition, but food safety is also a huge component. CNDH’s food safety education program trains food service workers in proper food handling procedures consistent with industry and regulatory based standards. Classes and workshops provide practical, hands-on experience for students to learn best practices to prevent food-borne illness and reduce sanitary health threats.

The District of Columbia Professional Food Managers/Food Handler Certification Program prepares food handlers for accredited food manager examinations. This course covers: the danger associated with food-borne illness, risk factors that contribute to food-borne disease outbreaks, characteristics of potentially hazardous foods, employee health and personal hygiene, safe food handling, equipment, facilities, and understanding of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP). Successful completion of the course allows individuals to sit for the national exam.

The UDC certification program is open to those looking to secure a food safety license in the District or surrounding area. Because the certification is national, it is acceptable anywhere in the United States for a period of five years, according to Paul Brown, CNDH project assistant. Food service industry segments like caterers, school cafeterias, and professional sports arena vendors all have workers whom need to be certified.

"We get people from all walks of life, from those who own a catering business to those selling peanuts at the baseball game," says Paul Brown.

A typical food safety certification class lasts for three days, or a combined total of 18 hours. The first day consists of a generic preliminary test to gauge understanding food handling and safety and another pretest specifically relevant to D.C. food regulations. After the tests and on the second day of the course, topics such as temperature, food handling, storage, clean up are covered. The exam is
administered on the third day of the course.

*How does the certification process begin?*

An agency will contact CNDH Director Dr. Lillie-Monroe Lord, who will set up a class. Most classes are offered on site at an organization, although UDC currently offers some and will offer additional courses once the commercial kitchens have been completed on the Van Ness campus, which are expected to be completed in the fall of 2014. Class size average around 15 participants, and two to three classes are offered per month. The cost is $147, which includes books, materials, the preliminary and final national exam.

Some of the agencies partnered with CNDH for food safety certification include: Homes for Hope, Greater Washington Urban League and the CAUSES Institute for Gerontology. The Center also partners with UDC's School of Business PATH Program. It should be noted that CNDH has experienced an increase in class enrollment over the last few years with the increased number of food trucks in the District.

*Why is food safety so important?*

Because food borne related illnesses such as *Salmonella* (chicken), *Trichinosis* (pork) and *Anisakiasis* (fish) are easily contractable when safe procedures are not followed. These illnesses can be contracted if bacteria is not killed by being cooked to the appropriate temperature or put away properly.

**Paul Brown's top 5 food safety tips:**

1. Wash your hands. "Wash for 30 seconds or sing the Happy Birthday song to yourself." Handwashing is more than just briefly running your hands under water. "Wash, soap, friction, hot water and paper towels," recommends Paul.
2. Food should be put away or refrigerated within two hours of being cooked and set out. "Bacteria increases after two hours."
3. Cook food to its recommended temperature to avoid food-borne illnesses. "Make sure that hot foods stay hot and cold foods stay cool."
4. Make sure your workspace is sanitary and clean up after you're done. "Common sense, basically."

5. Wash produce no matter where it was purchased. "If you've touched that tomato, just imagine how many other people have done the same exact thing." It's also important to wash bagged produce like salad. "Always err on the side of caution because you don't know how it was prepared or transported."

Thanks, Paul!

Paul Brown can be reached at pbrown@udc.edu. To enroll in the certification course, contact Dr. Lillie Monroe-Lord at lmonroelord@udc.edu.