

Health Services Agency - Department of Environmental Health

Background

Riverside County's population has increased from 663,000 in 1980 to an estimated 1,441,200 as of July 1997 and is projected to be at 1,775,000 by the year 2000.

The Department of Environmental Health's primary responsibility is the enforcement of pertinent California health laws, rules and regulations, as well as Riverside County ordinances. The mission of the Department of Environmental Health is to enhance the quality of life in Riverside County by implementation of effective and efficient health programs to protect the public health, safety and the environment.

The department's programs are organized under three divisions, the District Environmental Services, Hazardous Materials Management and Environmental Resources Management.

This report focuses on the Retail Food and Recreational Health programs within the District Environmental Services Division.

Retail Food Program

The purpose of the Retail Food Program is to assure that food provided for human consumption within Riverside County is safe to eat, of good quality, and that it has been produced under conditions and by practices that are in compliance with state and local laws, regulations and ordinances.

Routine inspections are conducted to insure safe food handling practices, proper sanitation practices and maintenance of more than 9,200 retail food facilities within Riverside County. The types of facilities included in this program are restaurants, markets, bakeries, public and private schools, food vehicles, carts, temporary events, produce stands, snack bars, bed and breakfast facilities, vending machines, commissaries and caterers.

There are a host of food-borne illnesses caused by improper food storage and preparation. These food-borne illnesses can cause a multitude of symptoms and, in rare cases, death. Salmonella and Escherichia Coli (E. Coli) are the most commonly known of these illnesses.

The State Environmental Health Department recommends a minimum inspection of each food facility three times annually.

Recreational Health Program

The Recreational Health Program provides routine and complaint inspections for more than 6,400 public swimming pools, spas and water parks to ensure public safety and proper sanitation.

This program is responsible for issuing permits and inspection of public pools and spas, with a goal of twice-per-year inspection.

Both programs are 100 percent fee-supported.

Findings

1. The department is budgeted for twenty-five environmental health inspectors. Currently, only nineteen positions are filled. Due to the vast geographic area and lack of staff, inspections are falling far below the recommended goal, as shown in Table 1.

Recruitment and retention of qualified Environmental Health Service (EHS) Inspectors are hindered by the low prevailing wage in Riverside County as opposed to neighboring counties, as shown in Table 2.

Table 1 - Fiscal Year 1998-99

	Facilities	Target Inspections	Actual Inspections	% Completed
Food*	4,670	14,427	9,162	63.5%
Pool/Spa	6,576	13,152	10,282	78%

(*This does not include produce stands, Christmas operations, seasonal non-profits, caterers, public school cafeterias, senior nutrition/summer feeding and commissaries.)

Table 2 - Dollars

	Riverside	Orange	San Diego	San Bernardino
EHS IV	38,408-47,590	41,148-55,428	No Position	42,042-53,690
EHS III	36,208-44,867	37,944-51,144	44,034-53,539	39,104-49,894
EHS II	33,299-41,184	35,940-48,468	40,082-48,693	37,232-47,507

In addition, Riverside County employees must pay their own retirement for the first five years, which further reduces their take-home pay.

2. Permit fees are structured to cover the cost of the services they provide. The current fee structure has not been adjusted in six years.

Recommendations

Riverside County Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct CEO/Human Resources to evaluate current compensation. Adjust compensation packages to improve the department's ability to compete, acquire and retain qualified personnel.

2. Review and adjust department fee structure to adequately fund all services.