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A study of restaurant safety in an age of biochemical terrorism

The outbreak of war in Iraq has raised the fears of some form of possible bio-chemical attack against the United States or other nations occurring in the foreseeable future. When experts speak of bio-chemical attacks, they often tend to view these attacks on the macro-level. That is to say, experts speak of poisoning large numbers of people, contamination of major resources, distribution of airborne illnesses or the spread of diseases such as smallpox.

The area that is of most concern is in the intentional poisoning of food delivered from the restaurant to the consumer.

History has shown that food and salad bars are easily open to attack. In an age of bio-chemical warfare, these bars require constant supervision. Video cameras can act as a major deterrent. If an incident is reported, having the food/salad bar on tape will become a major aid to law enforcement.

Neither approach is perfect. Both approaches have costs and benefits. To help to determine which methods are best for your establishment, the following suggestions are offered:

- Restaurant owners should not be afraid to market the fact that their restaurant prides itself on security. In today's world, the belief that security will drive customers away is simply false. Customers want to know what you are doing to protect them while still providing a comfortable ambiance and good food.
- Restaurant owners should attend state and national tourism and restaurant conferences that are addressing the issue of bio-chemical attack. The more they know the better they are able to protect your eating establishment's customers and reputation.
- Restaurant owners should meet with their local health department and police department. Owners need to explain to tourism policing department that they are seeking plans that are meant to decrease the possibility of a terrorist attack. It is an error to forget that a bio-chemical attack will not necessarily be aimed at a major city nor at a large restaurant. In fact, historically, these attacks have often been against small establishments at out-of-the way locations.
- Restaurant owners should make sure that all police personnel and security personnel are aware of how important security is to them. Most police have never been trained in good tourism security (and restaurants fall under the rubric of tourism security). It is essential to have a person work with your local police who can "translate" between tourism and security issues.
- Restaurant owners should need to create a city, state, and regional approach. If one or two restaurants are attacked in your area, the entire restaurant industry will be hurt. Terrorism is based on

the belief that random fear can destroy an economy. Terrorism attacks perceptions rather than hard facts.

- Restaurant owners should not live a false sense of security. Gas masks will do nothing in case of a biological or chemical attack, while sealed rooms may be very useful. Do not panic people, but deal with safety and security issues in the most professional manner possible. People begin to panic not when you take precautions in a professional manner, but when you fail to take precautions.
- Restaurant owners should not isolate their restaurant from the entire hospitality industry. A terrorist is more likely to attack an establishment as a way of destroying the local hospitality industry than as a way of hurting the restaurant owner personally. The odds are that the terrorist has nothing against the owner as a person, but rather views the destruction of his/her business as a means to an end.
- Restaurant owners should know what is unsafe in the community and work with local governments to improve these security concerns. How safe is your local airport? Are cab drivers' backgrounds investigated? Who has access to a guest's room? The safer the community the safer is one's restaurant.
- Restaurant owners should provide training courses for waiters and waitresses. Most waiters and waitresses are simply unaware of how a bio-chemical attack would manifest itself. You will want your staff to be trained in the some or all of the following areas:

- Changes in food coloring/smells
- Being alert to people placing any foreign substance into food/salad bars
- Too much wandering around the restaurant
- Seeking to enter the restaurant by irregular means
- Learning to open as many things as possible in front of customers
- Not leaving condiments on tables, such as ketchup bottles and mustard jars
- Reporting any strange powders left on a table
- Noting any irregularities in water served to patrons

When it comes to food poisoning restaurant staff members should be reminded that they are not medically trained personnel. Nevertheless, it is not a bad idea that staffs be given some training in common food poisonings. This training should include the fact that most common food poisoning are not deadly. In a world of terrorism, however, perhaps the most dangerous aspect is that we may confuse a common form of food poisoning that merely upsets the stomach with a more deadly variety.

Staff should also know when symptoms are most likely to occur, and what are the most common symptoms. Lastly what first aid measures to take and not to take, and whom to call to report a suspected case of intentionally induced food poisoning.

In a post September 11th world the restaurant industry has a whole new set of challenges before it. Restaurant professionals must begin to deal with security on multiple levels. Never before have restaurateurs needed to worry as much about security issues such as:

- Type of lighting used in parking lots and walkways leading up to restaurants
- Understanding where food is delivered, who is watching it, how food bars and salad bars are covered and how often they are inspected and what can go wrong in each specific location;

- Employee background checks. Restaurants often hire foreign workers, and people who may first be seeking to enter (or reentering) the labor market. Not only do cooks, chefs and waiters (waitresses) handle food, there are table cleaners and a host of other people who have access to food before it is served. Few restaurateurs know much about the personal lives of these people or what type of record they may have.
- Special security instructions for those working at cash flow centers and at entrances to restaurants such as Maitre D's. While profiling is wrong, many people often have a sixth sense regarding danger. Today's restaurant needs a method by which suspicious people can be watched without breaking anyone's rights and in a non-prejudicial manner
- Training issues. There is a need not only to continually teach restaurant personnel about bio-chemical attacks, but also what to do, if a problem occurs. For example, do you have one standard doctor who will be able to trace a problem, especially if the staff eats the restaurant's food? In a like manner each restaurant should do a regular review of fire safety procedures. Besides bio-chemical methods terrorism may strike in any number of ways. For example, personnel should be trained for:
 - Smoke. Many tourism employees know that not all smoke means a major fire. Their prime objective should be to evacuate the site at the first sign of smoke. When festivals are indoors it is essential to know that smoke accumulates at the ceiling. If exit signs are at the ceiling will they be seen during a fire? Do employees know that fresh air for breathing is near the floor?
 - Panic. How to handle panic and how not to panic. People who panic rarely save themselves or others. The more information that a guest and an employee have the less likely they are to panic.
 - Exits. Make sure that both festival attendees and employees know where the exits are located. It is important that signage in more than one language be provided that gives fire instructions that include evacuation information. Closed doors may keep fires out or keep smoke away from clothing.

In the restaurant world, this training must be repeated on a regular basis, as rapid staff turnover is often the norm rather than the exception.

Have visible guards/greeters/table wanders. Contrary to what some restaurant managers may believe, professional watchers are greatly appreciated and make patrons feel secure. They may also be the number one way that a restaurant owner may protect his/her establishment against a bio-chemical attack. This sense of security is especially true for female guests and visitors from foreign lands. Professional watchers/hosts (hostesses) if trained properly, not only do not hurt profits, but also can add to a restaurant's bottom line. Before hiring these people it is essential that you do a good background check as to possible criminal history or unacceptable personal histories. Find out for example, does the person have an arrest record, ever been part of a cult or is the person susceptible to political blackmail.

Security and Safety may have different meanings to scholars, but in the world of restaurants these terms are one and the same. In the new paradigm shift recognize that poison water and gunfire have the same results: the destruction of your business. Begin to see the relationship between risk management and security. They are two sides of the same coin.