

Partners with a Common Purpose Narrative- San Diego County, Department of Environmental Health and Quality and the San Diego Chapter of the California Restaurant Association (CRA)

For the County of San Diego, Department of Environmental Health and Quality and the San Diego Chapter of the California Restaurant Association (CRA), protecting public health to ensure that the public has a safe and enjoyable dining experience at restaurants is at the core of what we both do. By partnering and collaborating we have been able to learn from each other and strengthen our expertise to better serve customers. Regulators can help restaurants understand the science behind cooking procedures that could lead to risk for foodborne illness and play a critical role in helping to adapt and modify those, while navigating food safety regulations. Restauranters lead the food and equipment trends that drive new cooking techniques, and their knowledge is essential to understanding how to ensure newly implemented trends are safe. Sharing our knowledge and expertise to collaborate has made us both more successful in protecting public health. Over the years, this partnership in helped us smoothly navigate a wide variety of issues, including HACCP plans for specialized processes, food recalls, foodborne illness outbreak investigations, and regulatory changes.

The success of this partnership became even more valuable during the COVID-19 pandemic when California restaurants had to implement state guidelines which required developing and posting a Safe Operating Plan stating how the restaurant modified their operations to create six foot spacing or barriers and outdoor dining areas and protect the public from the spread COVID-19. We partnered to develop a standard, fillable Safe Operating Procedure that was then provided to our local restaurants, and additionally through state CRA and a state retail food safety coalition to be used at restaurants statewide. We communicated frequently to collaborate on a wide variety of ideas for compliance to keep diners safe and restaurants open, including: what changes to the facility could be done without plan check, how to manage staff exposures and COVID-19 cases of food handlers and diners at the restaurant, state guidelines changes and how the change would impact restaurants, creative solutions to comply with the guidelines in a variety of different restaurant settings, and how to modify menus to successfully implement a delivery or pick-up model.

We look forward to what our collaborative working relationship will help us navigate in the future and know that our partnership is working to provide a more comprehensive approach to protecting public health in San Diego County.

Heather Buonomo
County of San Diego
Department of Environmental Health and Quality

Chris Duggan
San Diego Chapter
California Restaurant Association