

FOIA Story

After two failed county health inspections in 2015, Blackhawk Commons now surpasses county procedures and strives to comply with all health code expectations.

According to the 2015 health inspection report, Blackhawk failed because of evidence of fruit flies, improper cooling temperatures in the coolers and salad bar, soiled floors/counter surfaces and employees not washing their hands.

Blackhawk was then re-inspected 10 days later and failed *again* due to damaged salad dressing containers, dirty floors/counter surfaces, still having fruit flies, and improper heating and cooling temperatures.

Winnebago County Health Inspector, Carly Maurer said restaurants will be charged a re-inspection fee if failed a third time.

Blackhawk is inspected once a year by the Winnebago County Health Department. Since 2015, Executive Chef Fritz Niebergall said he and management have evaluated the training of their staff, and are now working with a private inspection company to hold them to a higher standard.

“It’s constant follow up and constant teaching,” he said. “Everyday we check and document that the temperatures are correct. We go back and teach whatever the violation might be, understand *why* they don’t get it, and figure out *how* they can get it.”

The employees are required to attend a training session once a month that focuses on a specific health code procedure, he said.

“It could be anything from temperature controls, sanitizing, handwashing, or personal hygiene,” Niebergall said. “It could be things along the lines of, potential for contamination either physical or chemical.”

Once a day, while closed between lunch and dinner, a chemical and peroxide solution is used on all the counter surfaces to reduce the chance of the Norovirus that has been present on campus in recent years.

Niebergall said he also performs his own monthly inspections to make sure procedures are being followed.

“I follow pretty much the same guidelines,” he said. “I have a physical checklist that I go through and fill out and spend a couple hours doing it. You gotta think of it as a big picture, there’s so many different things that are happening and you have to look at each area and think well what could happen here?”

Niebergall said they always error on the side of caution, if something needs to be thrown away, its thrown away to avoid someone getting sick.

“Its food safety, you simply can’t let that go,” he said. “I eat here, students eat here, we serve 3,000 meals a day.”

Maurer was the health inspector for Blackhawk in 2017 and 2018 and said the staff now does a great job of working with EcoSure to make sure the health codes are being followed.

“They do their sanitizers there, they make sure their dish wash equipment is OK, their pest control is OK, I believe they go around the perimeter to make sure all the traps are okay,” she said.

Niebergall said they use EcoSure because they have stricter guidelines than Winnebago County, and it ensures they are correctly following health procedures.

“Hot food for Winnebago County would be 135 degrees, we do 140, minimum,” he said. “Cold food they would do 41, we do a minimum of 40.”

Niebergall understands the importance of the health code standards and holds Blackhawk employees accountable to keeping the dining hall safe.

“Obviously health codes are important and you have to follow them, there's no ifs ands or buts about it, it has to be done, there's no like ‘oh we don't have to do it today’ we gotta do it,” Niebergall said.

Now, Blackhawk serves as a great training opportunity for new health inspectors since it's a large dining hall and every station has different equipment that requires inspection.

“It's a very nice facility to train and they do a very nice job there,” Maurer said. “We only inspect Winnebago County so we don't have that many large complex restaurants like that, that's why Blackhawk is nice because they do everything there, and they also serve highly susceptible populations so that's more what we look for in an inspection.”

Maurer said she is impressed by how the staff is able to keep such a large dining hall healthy, safe, and up to county codes.

“I would give them a ten, they do a really great job there,” she said. “They're always clean and the staff is very well trained. It goes to show when they have so many students coming through, that they take pride in making sure that everything is safe and clean and that everyone is up to speed when it comes to training and the food safety aspects.”

Health Inspection Records: <http://healthspace.com/Clients/WI/Winnebago/web.nsf/home.xsp>