American Latex Allergy Association

Oregon Soon to Ban Latex Glove Use

Foodservice workers will not be allowed to use latex rubber gloves beginning in March 2003. *By Scott Hume R&I Managing Editor*

On March 1, 2003, Oregon joins a handful of other states that have prohibited use of latex gloves in foodservice facilities. Studies have identified latex as an allergen for a small percentage of the population. The possibility that allergens can be transferred from gloves to food also is a concern.

Other revisions to the state food code, including recognizing HACCP principles as the basis for food-protection programs, were effective Jan. 1, 2001, but the shift in glove use was delayed to give foodservice operations additional time to deplete latex-glove inventories and retrain staff.
The Oregon Restaurant Association (ORA) lobbied against the prohibition. ?We aren?t convinced the legislation is necessary,? says Bill Perry, director of government relations for the organization, which argued that restaurateurs voluntarily could eliminate latex-glove use where allergy concerns exist. Additionally, ORA questioned the fairness of limiting the prohibition to foodservice. The new law does not cover healthcare workers, although the Occupational Health & Safety Administration (OSHA) estimates that 8% to 12% of workers in the profession are latex-sensitive.

?We didn?t agree with the ban, but we have worked with Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) all along,? advising operators to provide alternatives gloves, says Perry, ?and we will continue to do so. Our role now is to educate our members about the law and ways to live with it.?

ODHS estimates that half of all foodservice facilities use latex rubber gloves. For those that do, the legislation will require some retraining, says Perry. Form-fitting gloves, including those made from latex, often are preferred according to ORA?s feedback, but ?they will simply have to adjust? to using single-use gloves in the coming months.

Confusing Rules
Differences in state regulations concerning latex glove use make it difficult for multi-state chain operators to develop a single standard for their systems.

The 2001 Food and Drug Administration Food Code prohibits foodservice employees from bare-handed contact with ready-to-eat foods, mandating that ?deli tissue, spatulas, tongs, single-use gloves or dispensing equipment? be used. For food that is not ready to eat, the requirement is that bare-hand contact be minimized. The code?s

only prohibition relates to use of cloth gloves for food handlers.

Arizona and Rhode Island are among states that have legislated bans on latex gloves in foodservice. Massachusetts? Department of Public Health and Wisconsin?s Department of Health and Family Services have followed the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health?s lead in recommending?but not requiring?that latex gloves not be used in foodservice

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