



Consumer Watch

A Monthly Newsletter from the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection

William M. Rubenstein, Commissioner

Dannel P. Malloy, Governor

www.ct.gov/dcp

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Suggested Links

www.ct.gov/dcp

Our website offers the latest and most comprehensive information that we have on dozens of consumer-related topics!

<https://www.elicense.ct.gov>

To verify a license, permit or registration, or to run a roster of licensees. Also, the place for online renewal!

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College Interns Meghan Malik and Daniel Grosso contributed to this issue of *Consumer Watch*.

On the Job with a Food Inspector: Ensuring Food Safety from Behind the Scenes

by Dan Grosso

The Department's Food and Standards Division has the important job of inspecting food processing plants and food retailers across the state, as well as bakeries. The division makes sure that conditions in the production plants are on par with state health regulations and that food is packaged properly.

"This work is essential to Connecticut residents as it assures that food products are safe, and labels are kept 'honest,'" Food and Standards Director Frank Greene said.

As a summer intern, I got the chance to observe some of the Department's field work. In order to better understand the role of the Food and Standards Division, I was privileged to go on the road with Linda Kranmas, a longtime inspector with the Division.

One of the first places we visited was the Triple Springs bottling plant in Meriden. Linda made sure that conditions in the bottling facility were safe and that all machinery was clean and running properly. She checked the operation of the plant's **ozonator**, a large drum that water passes through, where an extra oxygen atom is added to naturally clean the water.

Linda also checked all the plant's licenses to be sure they were current. We found a vending area outside the plant, so Linda confirmed that Triple Springs had an active vending license as well. Triple Springs had all of their licenses posted as required and passed the inspection easily.

We then visited a few bake shops, including a pizzeria. A pizzeria is considered a bakery by the State, as its main products are baked on site. A bakery inspection is a bit more involved than a bottling plant inspection, as food is actively prepared and served there.

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From Commissioner Rubenstein

These have been busy times at the Department of Consumer Protection. To save state dollars and provide efficiencies, our agency and the former Division of Special Revenue have merged, and we've worked hard to provide a seamless transition. You hear a lot about food safety during the summer, so Quinnipiac intern Dan Grosso went on the road with one of our inspectors to see what goes on behind the scenes. We completed a home improvement undercover operation down on the shoreline, and are working to begin implementing more than a dozen new statutes that affect the Department of Consumer Protection. Finally, with the upcoming change in seasons, we offer you a handy 'toolbox' of business types that you might want to get familiar with in the near future.

William M. Rubenstein



William M. Rubenstein was appointed Commissioner of the Department of Consumer Protection by Connecticut Governor Dannel P. Malloy in 2011.

We Welcome the Gaming Division!

As a result of cost-saving State agency consolidation efforts, effective July 1, 2011, the Department of Consumer Protection is Connecticut's state agency responsible for regulating legal gaming, replacing the agency formerly known as the Division of Special Revenue. During the 2011 Session of the General Assembly, all duties and responsibilities were transferred by statute from the Division of Special Revenue to the Department of Consumer Protection.

Through the Gaming Division, the Department of Consumer Protection regulates the State's legalized gaming activities, which include casinos, lottery, off-track betting and charitable games.

The Division works cooperatively with a five-member State Gaming Policy Board, appointed by the Governor, to implement and administer statutory provisions governing legal gaming contained in Chapters 98, 226, 226b, 226c and 229a of the Connecticut General Statutes.

The new Gaming Division is directed by Kenneth A. Flatto.

We welcome all of our new colleagues!

To contact the Gaming Division, [see this web page](#).

Department Heats up the Shoreline with Home Improvement Sting

By Dan Grasso

On July 19th, Commissioner William M. Rubenstein held a press conference next to an empty house in Waterford. One week before, the structure at the corner of Rope Ferry Road had been home to a three-month undercover operation by Department Trade Practices investigators. Posing as homeowners, they contacted and invited more than 100 local contractors to do work on the run-down property.

Commissioner Rubenstein addresses the media on July 19th in Waterford. Director of Trade Practices Richard E. Maloney is at right.



"Whenever we do this type of operation, we're looking for contractors who don't have the proper registration to work in Connecticut," Commissioner Rubenstein said. Investigators scoured more than 200 ads, bulletin board notices, postcards and online postings to find contractors advertising home improvement work in Connecticut. Of the 100 who visited the home and offered bids or contracts, 44 were unregistered, in violation of State law.

For this offense, the Department is fining each of them \$250 and requiring them to register as home improvement contractors. However, the Commissioner indicated that stronger enforcement measures are at the agency's disposal.

"In Connecticut, failure to register as a home improvement contractor or salesperson is a criminal offense, and we are prepared to use this enforcement measure when needed," he said.

This is the 10th time that a home improvement undercover operation has been run, and Commissioner Rubenstein says the operations have been greatly effective. When the first operation ran in 2000, about 60 percent of the contractors who came to the undercover house were unregistered. At the time of this recent operation in Waterford, the percentage of unregistered contractors was only 21 percent.

At the same time, the number of Connecticut-registered contractors increased from around 19,000 to nearly 27,000. These numbers suggest that the Department's enforcement and information activities are helping to get many home improvement contractors to comply with the law.

It's important for consumers that their contractors are registered. If a consumer is wronged by a state-registered contractor working on a home improvement contract, they can seek restitution from the state after obtaining a judgment and exhausting all other remedies, and receive up to \$15,000 per contract. On a new home contract, restitution can be as high as \$30,000.

Since home improvement problems continue to rank high on consumer complaint lists, the Department plans to continue its active enforcement of home improvement laws.

True or False? *(answers, page 4)*

1. There are over 2300 different types of Salmonella. **True or False?**
2. There are only a certain number of package stores allowed per town in Connecticut. **True or False?**

Food Inspection, *continued from page 1*

Before even entering the pizzeria, Linda noticed its door propped open to let out the heat, but there was no screen door -- a violation. It's mandatory for bakery facilities to have screen doors to prevent insects from entering the kitchen. Linda marked this in her report and made sure the owner knew to have a screen door installed before she came back for a follow-up inspection.

Next we looked at the kitchen. Inspectors make sure that counters and food preparation surfaces are clean and free of any unnecessary items. Linda found a package of cigarettes on the counter -- another violation. However, the pizzeria **was** in compliance for taking precautions against cross contamination between foods; the kitchen included a separate food prep counter for vegetables and one for meat ingredients.

Overall, the counters passed inspection, so we moved on to the refrigerator and freezer. Linda used a digital thermometer to check the internal temperatures of both coolers. Refrigerators and freezers should be kept cold enough to prevent bacteria growth, usually between 38 and 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Freezers should be kept at 0 degrees for safe food storage. These temperatures are recommended for home refrigerators and freezers too. A \$5 or \$10 refrigerator/freezer thermometer can be bought at most department or home improvement stores.

In the pantry, Linda looked for "shelf separation." While food and cleaners may be stored in the same area, they must be on separate shelves to prevent contamination of the food ingredients. Linda also used an LED flashlight to inspect the corners and floor for any pest residue.

Perhaps the most important part in this, and any food service inspection, is to make sure that employees exercise sanitary practices. Linda looked at the sinks in the kitchen, ensuring that each was stocked with soap and paper towels. She also checked that gloves were being worn by those preparing food. While it may be acceptable for a pizza maker to not wear gloves because pizzas are baked -- heated to a temperature high enough to kill germs -- anyone preparing salads, uncooked sandwiches or other raw foods must wear gloves. On this issue, Linda did cite the pizzeria in her report.

Next, we took a careful look at the pizzeria's menu, making sure that all of its information was accurate and properly displayed.

"One of the more common mistakes made on menus is usage of the term 'homemade,'" Linda said. "Even if the food is prepared onsite, it must be referred to as 'house made.'"

This isn't just semantics. In Connecticut, it's illegal to sell food prepared in homes. The State doesn't license people to sell products that they've baked in their own homes because it's impossible to control for various health factors. For example, pets, improper food handling, or various chemical contaminants in the kitchen could result in a baked product that's unsafe for someone to eat. Therefore, restaurants may not advertise any of their items as "homemade."

As the inspection drew to a close, Linda confirmed that all licenses were in order. As the law requires, the pizzeria's license was posted in a conspicuous place, by the cash register. With a few citations and assurances from the owners that they would make the required changes, the pizzeria passed inspection. But Linda warned that she'd be back in two weeks for a re-inspection to be sure that the screen door was installed, that counters contained only food products, and that gloves were on when required.

Frank Greene indicates that each year, approximately 5% of inspected locations have violations that require a re-inspection. The Department has the authority to seize or embargo food, and suspend or revoke a license. Department food inspectors and local health and building officials share information and collaborate on issues to ensure food safety for the buying public.

Shadowing a food safety inspector made me aware of the great care and concern that the Department of Consumer Protection's Food program puts into safeguarding Connecticut consumers.

New Laws Relevant to the Department of Consumer Protection

In 2011, the General Assembly passed, and Governor Malloy signed into law, more than a dozen Public Acts that affect the work of the Department. The following is a sample. To read about all of the new laws, visit [our website here](#).

P.A. 11-121 -- AN ACT CONCERNING THE PHARMACY PRACTICE ACT AND PRACTITIONER CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE REGISTRATION

P.A. 11-81 -- AN ACT CONCERNING LICENSING OF SWIMMING POOL INSTALLERS

P.A. 11-117 -- AN ACT CONCERNING LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS, PENALTIES FOR UNLICENSED OCCUPATIONAL WORK AND DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER PROTECTION RETIREMENT STATUS LICENSES

P.A. 11-73 -- AN ACT REGULATING THE SALE AND POSSESSION OF SYNTHETIC MARIJUANA AND SALVIA DIVINORUM

S.A. 11-14 -- AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL POLICE DEPARTMENTS AND RENEWAL OF CERTAIN ALCOHOLIC LIQUOR PERMITS

P.A. 11-164 -- AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE SALE OF CONNECTICUT WINE AT FARMERS' MARKETS AND ESTABLISHING A FARMERS' MARKET WINE PERMIT

P.A. 11-51 -- AN ACT IMPLEMENTING PROVISIONS OF THE BUDGET CONCERNING THE JUDICIAL BRANCH, CHILD PROTECTION, CRIMINAL JUSTICE, WEIGH STATIONS AND CERTAIN STATE AGENCY CONSOLIDATIONS. See sections 173 & 182-185

What's In Your Emergency Toolbox?

by Meghan Malik

As we move through the dog days of summer, it's time to get ready for stormier weather ahead. In the northeast, peak hurricane season runs between August and October, with September historically seeing the most storms. Once that ends in November, the frozen blasts of winter are not far away.

New Englanders know how to get ready and stay safe in whatever weather comes our way. But what about the clean-up afterward? Knowing who to call and trust when Mother Nature moves into your basement will save you money and stress. Start now to research, verify, and store these key business contacts in a couple of convenient locations in your house and car.

5 Must-Haves for Everyone's Home "Toolbox"

- **Locksmith** - Find one in your area with a real bricks and mortar shop; there are still a few around. Many fly-by-night companies rely on business from frantic, last-minute internet searches. Now is the time -- before you're locked out of your car or home -- to track down a reputable locksmith, and make sure he or she is registered with the Department of Consumer Protection. Store that name and number in few safe places, including your cell phone!
- **Plumber** - If you don't have a regular plumber, talk to friends and family about who they've used, and whether they did a good job at a fair price. Important: Did they clean up afterwards? There are many license types; each is qualified for a different type of plumbing work. [Click here](#) to review license types and scope of work for plumbing licensees. Check references and choose the individual you feel comfortable with.
- **Electrician** -- Ask for references from people you trust, set up interviews, and choose a business to work with. Different license types are qualified for different types of electrical work. Generally someone with an E-1 license is qualified to do **all** types of electrical work around your home, but you can [click here](#) to review license types and scope of work for electrical licensees.
- **Home Improvement Contractor(s)** - Talk to people who are having work done now or in the recent past, get names and carefully check references. You may want to speak with your local building inspector, especially to learn who you should **avoid**. Remember to verify that your contractors are registered with the Department of Consumer Protection!
- **Tree Service / Arborist** - If a tree falls on your property and needs to be completely removed, you can use a registered home improvement contractor for the removal work. But in order to treat a tree with broken limbs -- a tree you want to save -- you need the services of a licensed arborist. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection licenses arborists, so be sure that anyone you choose is properly licensed and insured.

Anyone not licensed or registered **and** properly insured should NOT be included on your emergency list -- find someone else! When dealing with emergency damage, you don't need more problems arising from work being done improperly or illegally. Except for arborists, you can verify all the above licenses and registrations online at <https://www.elicense.ct.gov>. To verify an arborist license, call the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection at (860) 424-3000.

True or False? *Answers*

1. **The correct answer is True.** Salmonella is a food-borne illness that can be transmitted in raw or undercooked eggs, poultry and meat, raw milk and dairy products, and seafood. Improper food handling can also spread the illness. Be extra cautious when cooking with any of these products to prevent this illness from occurring. For more information, please [click here](#).

The correct answer is True. Under Section 30-14a of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Department of Consumer Protection may issue one (1) package store permit for every 2,500 residents of a town -- as determined by the most recently completed decennial census. To see the number of package stores that are allowed by law in any municipality, [see this web page](#).