

**SUSANA MARTINEZ, GOVERNOR**

Butch Tongate, Cabinet Secretary

J.C. Borrego, Deputy Secretary

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*The Environment Department's mission is to protect and restore the environment and to foster a healthy and prosperous New Mexico for present and future generations.*

**New Mexico Environment Department Strengthens Food Safety Food Rules***First Set of New Rules Are Now in Effect:**Implementation Period for Certification Rules Extended to March 1, 2018*

**Santa Fe, NM** – Today, the New Mexico Environment Department announced that it has strengthened food safety rules for restaurants and food establishments – with the first set of rules now in effect. The stronger rules incorporate more state-of-the-art food preparation technologies and increase clarity for workers and customers with more comprehensive guidance.

“It is absolutely imperative that we have strong food safety rules to help prevent New Mexicans from getting sick,” said New Mexico’s Environment Secretary Butch Tongate.

Improved food safety is associated with preventable death and illness. With these changes, the state is now in alignment with the United States Food and Drug Administration’s model food handling rules. The Environment Department aims to educate and assist approximately 7,000 food service facilities in its jurisdiction to comply with the enhanced rules. “We are working with New Mexicans so that, together, we can reduce the incidence of foodborne illness and death in our state,” said Secretary Tongate.

Adopted by the state’s Environmental Improvement Board (EIB) in 2016, the revised food rules were discussed at 15 stakeholder meetings across New Mexico. Trainings were conducted statewide and presentations made to the Greater Santa Fe Restaurant Association, the Small Business Association, the New Mexico Health Care Association, and the State Public School Food Nutrition Conference with over 7,000 flyers distributed which explained the food regulation changes to food establishments. A dedicated website was also developed for 24/7 access to the revised food rules’ resources at: [https://www.env.nm.gov/fod/Food\\_Program/Regulation\\_Update.htm](https://www.env.nm.gov/fod/Food_Program/Regulation_Update.htm) .

The New Mexico Environment Department has jurisdiction for food safety across the state, except for Bernalillo County and the City of Albuquerque which have implemented their own food codes and programs.

Although the enhanced food safety measures were adopted by the state’s EIB in 2016, this year the department is revisiting the certification rules for the Food Handler Cards and Certified Food Protection Manager requirements – which are slated to go into effect next year on March 1, 2018. Secretary Tongate said, “We want to ensure that the rules for handling unpackaged foods are applied to the appropriate food service entities.”

New Mexico’s strengthened food regulations and the provision for Food Handler Cards are supported by the New Mexico Restaurant Association, and have been cited as a contributing factor to reduced rates of foodborne illness and death in other states adopting similar requirements.

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