

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF STATE HEALTH SERVICES



DIVISION FOR REGULATORY SERVICES ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSUMER SAFETY SECTION POLICY, STANDARDS, AND QUALITY ASSURANCE UNIT PUBLIC SANITATION AND RETAIL FOOD SAFETY GROUP

PUBLIC SANITATION AND RETAIL FOOD SAFETY GROUP REGULATORY CLARIFICATIONS

February 9, 2001 (Revised: July 24, 2015)

PSRFSGRC - No. 7

SUBJECT: WOODEN SKEWERS AS SINGLE-SERVICE ARTICLES

Applicable Texas Food Establishment Rules (TFER) Sections:

§228.2(135) Single-service articles

§228.101(g) Wood, use limitation

§228.102 Single-service and single-use, characteristics

Question:

Are single-service wooden skewers allowed under the TFER?

Response:

The TFER allows the use of wooden skewers, if they are for single-service and are safely constructed.

Support:

The definition of single-service articles in the TFER, §228.2(135) lists examples of some items that are considered to be single-service articles. All of the items "... are designed and constructed for one time, one person use after which they are intended for discard." The list of items is not exclusive and includes items that are similar to wooden skewers, such as toothpicks and stirrers.

There are some concerns with the use of wood as a food-contact surface. §228.101(g) of the TFER limits the use of wood and requires that, if used as a food-contact surface, the wood must be made of "hard, close grained wood, such as but not limited to maple, walnut, mahogany, bamboo and pecan." The Federal Food and Drug Administration discuss in the Public Health Reasons Annex of the 2015 Food Code some of the reasons for limiting the use of wood. There is a concern that "moist foods may cause the wood surface to deteriorate and the surface may become difficult to clean." If the wooden skewers are limited to single-service articles, then they would not be required to be cleaned and they would not be given time to deteriorate.

§228.102 of the TFER states the required characteristics of single-service articles. It is required that “materials that are used to make single-service and single-use articles may not allow the migration of deleterious substances or impart colors, odors or tastes to food and shall be safe and clean.” The wooden skewers must be constructed to meet these requirements if they are to be used in contact with food.

The Food Code also warns of the possibility of the migration of any wood preservative chemicals into the food. Only specific preservatives are allowed in any wood that will be used as a food-contact surface. The type of preservative in the wooden skewers, if any, would have to be determined and approved before the skewers could be approved.

In conclusion, if the wooden skewers are constructed of a hard, smooth, and clean wood, then there is no reason to prevent them from being used as single-service articles. The food establishment operator should determine if the skewers meet these requirements and should have documentation from the manufacturer that they do not contain any harmful chemical preservatives.

Agree to form and substance:



Christopher Sparks, MPA, R.S.

Manager

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