



A Premium Quality Retailer Faces a Major Assault on Brand Value

Situation

Food Safety is becoming a challenge for many food service establishments. With growing pressure from Federal agencies and provocative coverage in the media, many local health inspectors have become very aggressive in pursuing food code violations. Even grocers have come under fire. Retailers that provide ready-to-eat food services are very much at risk and can count on frequent audits.

In an upscale neighborhood with a particularly zealous health department, a grocery was cited and received nearly a \$300,000 fine for case temperatures that were consistently above 40 degrees. The store argued that the case temperature on the manufacturer-supplied thermometer indicated that the equipment was operating properly. With no data to back-up the claim, the fine stood.

FreshLoc Application

To protect against a reoccurrence of a failed audit and future citations, a FreshLoc system was installed. In addition, the company wanted to prove to themselves, the health department and the refrigeration equipment manufacturer that the case design was, at least in part, responsible for the unsafe temperature.

The fact that the FreshLoc system was wireless and inexpensive made it very easy to install multiple sensors in each case. Initially the focus was on cases with potentially hazardous foods. Nearly twenty sensors were placed in the sixty-foot case. Temperatures were found to vary more than 35 degrees throughout the case. Because the refrigerated case was an older design it was very difficult to maintain temperature continuity across the entire case. Lowering high temperatures in one area dropped other areas to below freezing causing product spoilage.

Using detailed graphs provided by the FreshLoc system, the company's QA officer was able identify a major contributor to the problem: employees were leaving some of the rear-loading doors partially open, creating a draft that pulled warm air in from the store. This caused the equipment to work twice as hard to maintain temperature.

Results

It has been over a year since the system was installed. New employee procedures have been implemented and there have been no citations. The company is in the process of expanding the FreshLoc System to its other stores and will link all data together on a single, secure network. The company has not only secured its high quality reputation, it has significantly reduced energy and equipment operating and maintenance costs by some 18%.