

A major issue for some Boston food trucks? Hand-washing

E-MAIL

FACEBOOK

TWITTER

GOOGLE

LINKEDIN

22



BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF

Customers lined up during lunch hour at a food truck in Dewey Square last week.

By [Megan Woolhouse](#) and [Matt Rocheleau](#)

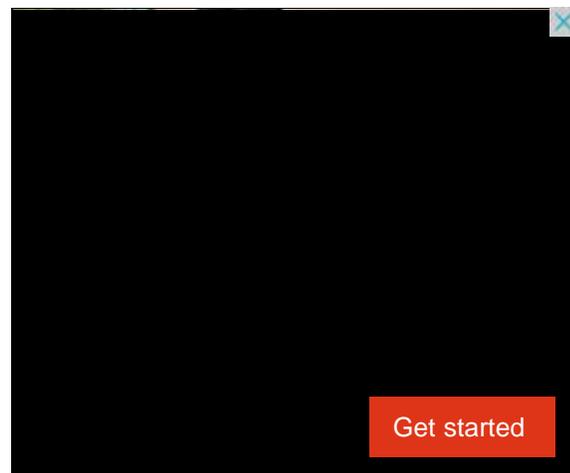
GLOBE STAFF JUNE 04, 2017

They're restaurants on wheels, churning out everything from pan-seared dumplings to juicy porchetta

sandwiches for the city's hungry lunchtime crowds.

But food trucks, which are proliferating at a rapid pace around Boston, are more likely to be temporarily shut down for serious health violations than their brick-and-mortar counterparts, most commonly for violating a basic requirement for proper sanitation: running water.

A Boston Globe review of 2016 city health records found that while food trucks were less likely overall than restaurants to have violations, they were more likely to be suspended for serious issues that pose an "imminent public health threat." Nine of the city's 96 licensed food trucks last year were closed on the spot until the violations were corrected, usually within a week or two. By comparison, two of every 100 restaurants were suspended.



"Food trucks have unique risks compared to regular establishments, additional challenges" when it comes to food safety, said Tennessee State Epidemiologist Tim Jones, a national expert in the spread of food-borne illness. "Clean water is extremely important."

Get Talking Points in your inbox:

An afternoon recap of the day's most important business news, delivered weekdays.

Sign Up

A recent E. coli outbreak that shuttered several food trucks operated by the Chicken & Rice Guys has raised questions about whether these movable feasts are as safe as traditional restaurants.



Food trucks that were temporarily closed

These specific trucks were shut down in Boston last year after health inspectors found critical violations.

Food trucks in Boston were cited for violations 200 times in 2016, and of that total, about half were serious infractions, and the other half minor. A majority of the most serious violations that led to temporary suspensions were related to water, or the lack of it.

On board some trucks, the water tank was empty or a sink or pipe leaked, so employees were not able to rinse vegetables and surfaces or wash their hands, as required by health regulations.

City inspectors closed The Savory Truck outside Brigham and Women's Hospital in April 2016 after inspectors found condensation dripping into food and no water for employees to wash their hands, according to city inspection reports.

The next day, officials temporarily shuttered Saigon Alley, a food truck specializing in Vietnamese fare in the Financial District. Health inspectors said there was "no evidence of handwashing due to broken pipes at handsink."



The Clover food truck parked at Dewey Square was ordered to close immediately last October. Once again, the issue was water.

In 2013, Clover voluntarily pulled its trucks off the road after a salmonella outbreak affected 12 people, at least half of whom ate at one of its restaurants or food trucks. Salmonella bacteria can cause diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps, and in severe cases, hospitalization.



BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF

On the Rose Kennedy Greenway, customers lined up for lunch at a food truck.

Water and hand-washing are fundamental to keeping harmful bacteria at bay in any food establishment, but even more critical on a food truck, said Doug Powell a former professor of food safety at Kansas State University and an author of Barfblog.com, which chronicles food-borne illness outbreaks.

In a small space, washing takes on more importance because bad bacteria can spread more quickly. Cutting surfaces on the trucks are used for a variety of tasks, he said, and workers who serve food

might also collect payments.

The rolling restaurants are also not connected directly to a city's water supply and rely instead on a water tank connected to a sink, much like on a boat or airplane. Water can simply run out, and finding places to refill poses another dilemma, so workers might cut corners to conserve it.

"All of those health problems get magnified in a smaller space on a food truck," Powell said. "So you really have to be good at what you're doing."

The problems have come to light as food trucks soar in popularity. The number of trucks in Boston grew from 14 in 2010 to 96 in 2016.

Trucks generally operate without significant problems, and the industry has long argued that they are as safe as — if not safer than — restaurants.

A 2014 report by the Institute for Justice, a public interest law firm in Virginia that advocates for the industry, focused on overall health violations rather than temporary truck closures to assess risks. It found that Boston trucks had fewer violations than restaurants overall, but glossed over the fact that the trucks get virtually the same number of serious violations as restaurants.

Based on inspection reports collected from 2011 through July 2013, the institute said there were 2.7 violations per food truck in Boston, compared with 4.6 violations per restaurant.

An institute spokesman, Rob Frommer, said the report did not analyze closures because the group wanted a broad analysis of food trucks that's based on routine annual inspections instead of suspensions.

In Boston, a health inspector may cite an establishment for violations, but only the most urgent safety infractions will lead to a temporary suspension warranting a temporary closure.

William Christopher, Boston's commissioner for Inspectional Services, said he thinks the rate of food truck suspensions means that inspectors are doing a good job identifying problems.

"We've been working closely with the food truck people to better inform them of our expectations," Christopher said.

Matt Geller, president of the National Food Truck Association, said one of the best indicators of a

food truck's health safety record is a letter grade issued by local health officials. Such grades are required on all trucks in Los Angeles, he said, and are being rolled out in Boston.

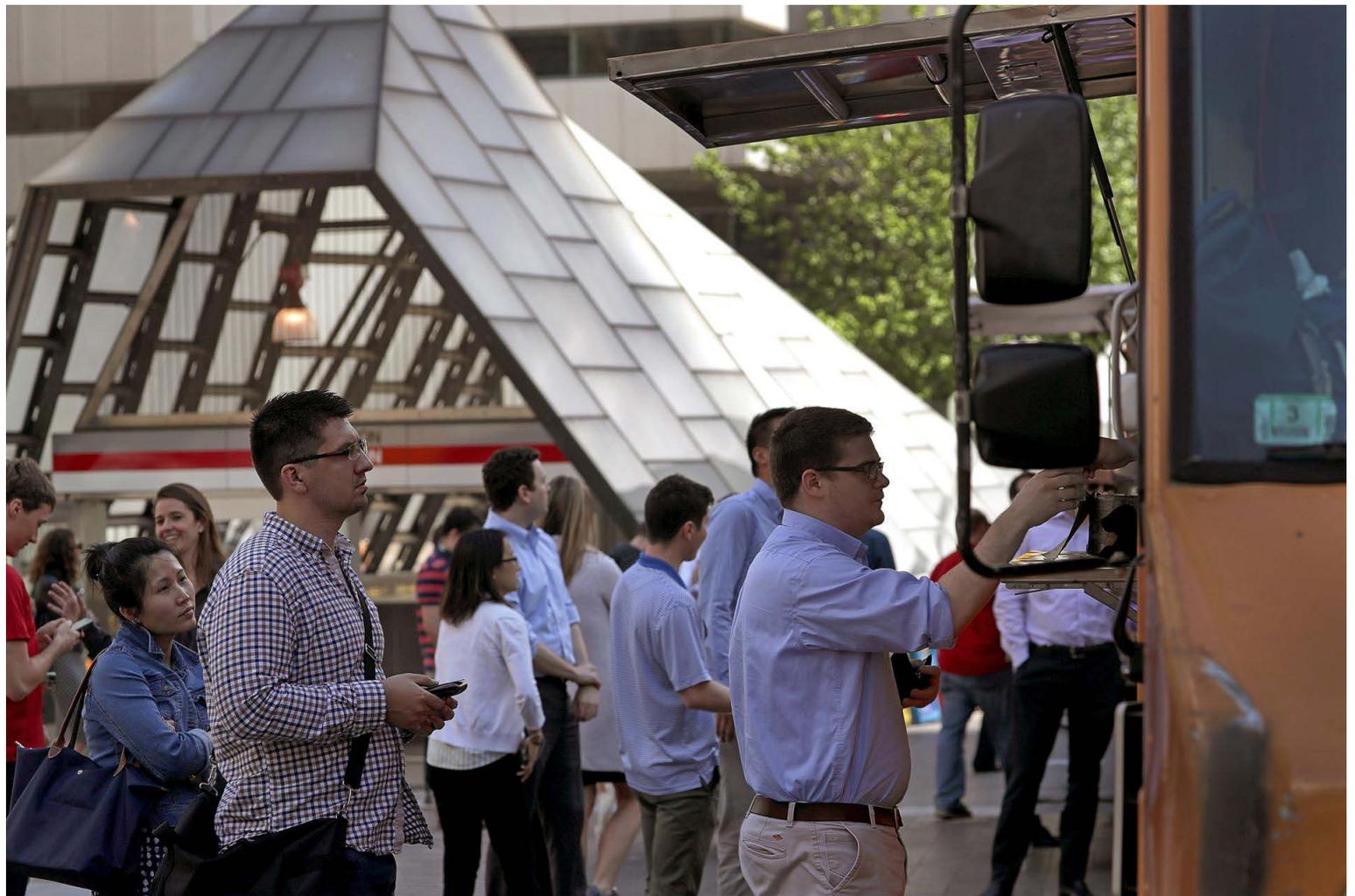
"We see E. coli outbreaks in restaurants, so it's not about the vehicle or the food," Geller said. "It's about the particular operation."

City officials began scoring restaurants and food trucks in November 2016, and assigning letter grades of A, B, or C.

Consumers can also check out the "Mayor's Food Court" on the city's website, www.boston.gov/health-and-human-services/mayors-food-court, where the Inspectional Services Department posts its findings.

Yet the letter grades and inspector's findings tell only part of the story.

Unlike in brick-and-mortar restaurants, where food is usually cooked on-site, food served by trucks is typically made in commissaries or rented kitchens, and loaded on board.



BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF

Problems at one of those commissaries came to light recently during a Chicken & Rice Guys E. coli outbreak that sickened 15 people who ate food from its trucks and its Allston restaurant.

Health investigators from the Somerville and state public health departments inspected the Foundation Kitchen commissary after the outbreak and found a rodent infestation. Inspectors also said a garden hose connected to a bathroom faucet was used to fill food trucks' water tanks. (That is not allowed for several reasons, including that bathroom plumbing has no "backflow" prevention device.)

The commissary had also been forced to close for three days in 2015 after inspectors found filthy equipment and a general lack of cleanliness.

Foundation Kitchen's owner, Ciaran Nagle, told the Globe last month that he would no longer rent commissary space to food trucks, saying it was ill-equipped to handle their needs.

In the meantime, the Chicken & Rice Guys food trucks have not yet returned to the road, although its restaurants have reopened. The source of the E. coli has not been identified.

A Boston food safety consultant, Lisa M. Berger, said the way food trucks move their food between sites, with more people packing and handling the food, creates the potential for more problems.

Berger said while that won't stop her from eating at her favorite food trucks, she checks the Mayor's Food Court website to review inspectors' findings, as a precaution.

"Definitely there are more issues with mobiles," she said of the trucks. "There's more that can go wrong."

Megan Woolhouse can be reached at megan.woolhouse@globe.com. Follow her on Twitter [@megwoolhouse](https://twitter.com/megwoolhouse).

SHOW 22 COMMENTS

Stay updated, right in your news feed.

Most Popular In Business →



This defunct dry dock could be the city's next great park

Forget about building condos or offices at Dry Dock No. 4. The Seaport District needs a signature public space. [MORE...](#)



Baker picks for pot advisory board include anti-pot police chief

Walpole Police Chief John Carmichael Jr. has vocally opposed both recreational and medical marijuana. [MORE...](#)



Chan buys yet another property in Savin Hill

Billionaire investor Gerald Chan scooped up another slice of Savin Hill Monday, closing on a deal to buy a 4.7-acre site steps from the Red Line station. [MORE...](#)



Berklee students and grads create a noteworthy niche: music for video games

They've worked on "Super Knight Quest", "Mondrian", "Call of Duty", "Halo", and many others.

[MORE...](#)



Partners to acquire R.I.'s Care New England

Partners HealthCare has agreed to acquire one of Rhode Island's largest hospital operators, Care New England Health System of Providence. [MORE...](#)

Remember Dan Lyons from HubSpot? He's back with more books

The Winchester-based writer said he has a two-book deal with the publisher of "Disrupted," his book about HubSpot. [MORE...](#)



Get ready for Convention Center Expansion 2.0

The state's convention hall operator issued a request for proposals to design a master plan for the 70-acre campus. [MORE...](#)



Now showing at Raytheon: Missiles in 3-D

Rocket scientists at Raytheon use a 320-degree ring of 72 ultra-high-definition LCD TVs, stacked 8 feet high, to make the abstract tangible. [MORE...](#)



Sexist grill still par for the course at Charles River Country Club

A \$1 million renovation of the Newton club's men's locker room includes a single-sex pub complete with food, booze, and a stone fireplace. [MORE...](#)



'Cool Streets' report ranks Boston's hotspots

If you've been searching for the hippest neighborhoods in America, there's an enormous commercial real estate brokerage with a list just for you. [MORE...](#)

Friday's business agenda

Earnings reports, gas prices, beginner workshops and other notable events and things to know. [MORE...](#)

Top largest employers

This year, the Globe invited 2,021 companies to participate in the Top Places to Work survey, 332 went all the way through the process. More than 70,000 employees rated them on things like direction, execution, connection, management, work, pay, and benefits. Winners are declared in four categories: small companies (50 to 99 workers); medium (100 to 249); large (250 to 999); and largest (1,000 or more). Companies marked “new” may have appeared in a different size category on last year’s list. [MORE...](#)



Investors want more women, minorities on corporate boards

This year the Massachusetts pension fund acted against 1,690 companies for failing to meet state criteria on gender and racial diversity on boards. [MORE...](#)

A bill arrives a year later. Do you have to pay it?

As annoying as it is to be charged for something that seems a distant memory, as long as the charge is proper, you’re on the hook. [MORE...](#)

Liberty Mutual shedding its workers’ comp roots

Liberty Mutual Insurance, once the country’s biggest provider of workers’ compensation insurance, is pulling back from the market. [MORE...](#)

Charlie Baker’s political calculus with MassHealth reforms

Governor Charlie Baker just made a big political gamble. Time will tell whether it will pay off. [MORE...](#)

Is it time to drop the ‘Donuts’?

At first glance, stripping the “Donuts” from Dunkin’ Donuts might seem radical. [MORE...](#)

GE confirms it’s heading to Boston

Mayor Walsh said the expected property tax revenue that will come to the city will far outweigh what



it gives up in future taxes. [MORE...](#)



Five Nobel laureates backing antiaging dietary supplement

A pill called Basis claims to enable the body to produce more of a natural compound that supports a healthy metabolism. [MORE...](#)

Top 10 Trending Articles

Most Viewed

Most Commented

Most Shared

Nick Cafardo: Which players may be available in trade after ...

Trump administration advances religious researchers' birth ...

What's it like be an NFL quarterback at 40? We asked Warr...

Storms could bring hail and severe winds Saturday

Trump forsakes scenic traditions to vacation in the land of s...

Dick Albert, former Channel 5 weatherman, dies
My Account

There's one month left of summer. Here's what you can't mi...
Manage my Account

Trump increasingly isolated as disillusionment grows withi...
Mobile Customer Service

Sign Up For Newsletters
Daghy Apennola never considered retiring or playing for a t...

Contact
Jaylen Brown's trip for the NBA Africa Game continues his ...

Help

FAQs

Globe newsroom

Advertise

Social

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Google+](#)

[More](#)

[ePaper](#)

[News in Education](#)

[Archives](#)

[Privacy policy](#)

[Terms of service](#)

[Terms of purchase](#)

[Work at Boston Globe Media](#)

© 2017 Boston Globe Media Partners, LLC