

VIRGINIA'S TOURIST ESTABLISHMENT SANITATION PROGRAM¹

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As a rule, regulatory measures are enacted only as needs and demands of the public are demonstrated. This was certainly true as regards the development of a tourist establishment sanitation program in Virginia; therefore, a review of the birth of Virginia's tourist establishment sanitation program is essential to a full realization of its scope and accomplishments.

The Virginia Department of Agriculture, prior to 1942, was charged with the responsibility of administering outmoded laws which prescribed sanitary requirements for hotels, service stations and trailer camps, as well as restaurants; but there was no restaurant law or rules and regulations. The law just said it was somebody's responsibility to enforce a non-existent law.

In 1942, the General Assembly of Virginia, in what was known as the Reorganization Act, transferred the aforementioned activities from the Department of Agriculture to the State Department of Health. With the advent of World War II, personnel were not available and money for the service was equally as scarce. Therefore, with only scattered local city and county food establishment ordinances in effect and the outmoded laws previously mentioned, little real progress was made.

Just prior to World War II, an increased travel trend was noted with interest by local and Statewide agencies and by individuals who envisioned an improved economy for the State. The general idea caught on, and the Virginia State Conservation and Development Commission and State and local Chambers of Commerce were advocating to the General Assembly a Statewide clean-up of places catering to tourists. There was then formed within the State a volunteer organization composed of hotel, motor court, restaurant, and petroleum representatives, as well as representatives of women's clubs, garden clubs, service clubs and others. The name of the new organization was "The New Virginia", a forerunner of the Virginia Travel Council. Finally, the General Assembly of Virginia, during its regular session of 1946, directed the Virginia Advisory Legislative Council to make a study and report on existing statutes and regulations governing certain establishments serving the tourist trade, in the following language:



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"Be it resolved by the House of Delegates of Virginia, the Senate concurring, That The Virginia Advisory Legislative Council is directed to make a thorough study and report on existing laws and regulations governing the sanitation of hotels, tourist camps, restaurants, filling stations and other similar establishments catering to our transient visitors, to the end that more effective inspection, regulation and control may be obtained by appropriate legislation; and,

"Be it further resolved, That the Council report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly, on or before September one, nineteen hundred and forty seven, together with appropriate legislation to carry its recommendation into effect."

The Council appointed as its chairman a member of the Senate. Other members consisted of a representative of the State Conservation and Development Commission, the State Chamber of Commerce, the State Police, the State Department of Health and an officer of the Motor Court Association.

¹Presented at the 44th Annual Meeting of the INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MILK AND FOOD SANITARIANS, INC., at Louisville, Kentucky, October 7-10, 1957.

The Committee held several meetings and one public hearing, after due publicity, which was well attended. Evidence was presented to the Committee that, while many hotels, tourist camps, tourist homes, restaurants and service stations were endeavoring to maintain a degree of sanitation acceptable to tourists, a great many such places were a disgrace to the Commonwealth. Altogether, an array of evidence was presented to the effect that the sensibilities of tourists were being offended and that the tourist trade was being adversely affected because such conditions continued to prevail.

The Committee reported that the State Department of Health, charged with the responsibility of inspecting hotels, motor courts, restaurants, etc., was handicapped by being unable to pay inspectors salaries commensurate with those paid in private industry and also that only a fraction of the number of inspectors required to execute the job could be retained by the State Health Department under its present budget. Therefore, the Committee recommended as the first step in the encouragement of a greater travel industry for the State the appropriation of sufficient funds to provide adequate inspection services.

It was discovered that the laws of the State governing establishments catering to the travel trade, had been enacted over a long period of years as required by developments, and that many were archaic, outmoded and as a whole totally inadequate to meet present needs.

For this reason, the Committee submitted proposed statutes which it believed highly desirable to have enacted into the laws of the State by the General Assembly of Virginia. The Committee believed them to be fair and reasonable; and that proper observance and/or enforcement would satisfy the demands of the traveling public. An expansion of the tourist trade would protect and enhance the investment of the more than 16,000 business establishments directly dependent upon such revenue. The tourist trade had almost proven itself to be depression-proof and was capable of absorbing large numbers of unemployed during periods of national depression.

The Committee drafted four laws prescribing sanitary regulations for transient lodging facilities, service stations, trailer camps and restaurants, and expressed the opinion that the cost of enforcement would prove to be the cheapest and most effective way of advertising the beauty within the borders of this Commonwealth. All four laws were enacted at the 1948 session of the General Assembly and funds appropriated for administration and enforcement by the newly created Bureau of Tourist Establishment Sanitation

within the Health Department's Division of Local Health Services.

Trade organizations heartily supported the proposed bills which were enacted into law. The Virginia Restaurant, Hotel Motor Court, Tourist Home and Petroleum Associations were called in soon thereafter to study the laws and to suggest clarifications in the form of Rules and Regulations to be adopted by the State Board of Health. The opportunity to participate in this study was much appreciated by all aforementioned organizations, for they were having a real part in the formulation of rules which were to govern their businesses. It also provided further opportunity for the leaders of the industry and those persons who were to direct the newly established service to become better acquainted. It had a tendency to dispel natural fears of ruthless enforcement by untrained and power-thirsty sanitarians. It, and subsequent events, led to a general feeling of mutual interest and respect between the enforcement agency, and the managers of most of the more than 20,000 establishments, who are still as individualistic as farmers were thought to be a generation ago. There is no intention to give the impression that there have been no rough spots during the past nine years; there have been several hundred closures each year of a dirty fringe that either could not or would not meet reasonable requirements. As evidence that the program is loyally supported by the travel agencies, the general public and the courts, less than one-fifth of the 571 places closed last year were willing to defend their records in court.

Annual permits to operate are required of all establishments except service stations. For administrative purposes, the State is divided into twelve districts at the present time. All letters of warning, revocation of permits, and time extensions on the advice of district sanitarians having jurisdiction are in writing, addressed to the manager and signed by the Director of the Bureau at the Richmond office. Also, permits to operate are mailed from the Richmond office, except those for restaurants and trailer camps located in organized health districts where the Commissioner delegates the responsibility to the Health Director having jurisdiction.

The Bureau's staff consists of a director, a general supervisor, a chief hotel sanitarian, two food consultants, two food sanitarians, twelve district sanitarians, one secretary, one stenographer and one clerk. The work load on the Health Department's Tourist Establishment Sanitation program is as follows:

Food Establishments	11,032
School Cafeterias	1,073
Trailer Courts	365

Service Stations	5,728
Hotels	485
Motor Courts	1,137
Tourist Homes & Classified Lodging	1,910

Special activities include:

1. Giving sanitary supervision of food services in penal institutions, mental hospitals and tuberculosis institutions.
2. Acting in an advisory capacity to the aforementioned institutions on food service equipment.
3. Conducting food service personnel classes in these institutions.
4. Assisting local health departments with food handlers' classes. Certificates of Attendance are awarded those attending a minimum of three hours of instruction. More than seven thousand certificates were awarded last year.
5. Performing ratings of food sheds and reporting to the Commissioner and Director of Local Health Services on the status of this service in the several health jurisdictions.
6. Giving seasonal assistance to local health departments situated in resort areas in their program of restaurant sanitation.
7. Enforcing all four laws in the absence of a full time health department service.
8. Supplying supplementary service in organized counties and cities where service is ineffective or where personnel is inadequate to provide service.
9. Assuming sanitary control of food services on boats or ferries plying Virginia waters.
10. Reviewing plans and specifications for swimming pools to be installed at transient lodging places, and issuing permits for the installation.

As an example of Virginia's Bureau of Tourist Establishment Sanitation's versatility and mobility, the increased load imposed this year by the Jamestown Festival was handled by local health departments without hardship since the Bureau's food sanitarians were on loan to those departments most directly affected. Also, several sanitarians, since May 1, have made thousands of additional inspections of homes which agreed to open their homes to tourists in the Jamestown - Williamsburg - Newport News - Virginia Beach areas. No person has been required to forego either lodging or food even during peak travel periods in these areas.

Virginia's travel industry is currently worth between three-fourths billion and one billion dollars annually, as against ninety-eight million in 1946. A generous amount of credit is given the Virginia State Health Department by those interested in increasing the value of the travel industry because of the impartial enforcement of sanitation laws having Statewide application.

By land, sea and air, thirty-five million residents of other states and nations will visit Virginia this year. The tourist business is the second largest industry in the State, and it touches every segment of Virginia's economy. It's just good business to foster it. If an acceptable job of salesmanship in interpreting and enforcing the several laws has been done by the Virginia State Health Department, it is largely because of the splendid and friendly support of one of the most aggressive and alert Travel Councils in the Nation, State and local Chambers of Commerce, the State Conservation and Development Commission, and the wise leadership of the several trade organizations, and the support of the public. It is, in any event, a demonstrable example of a health activity paying off in dollars and cents, as most of them do.