

Pest fest: Mall food courts overrun by roaches, rodents

By: **Markham Heid**
Examiner Staff Writer
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Read more at the Washington Examiner: http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/local/Pest-fest_-Mall-food-courts-overrun-by-roaches_-rodents-1009649-100653949.html#ixzz0x4MJOMwK

Notice some extra crunch in your grilled chicken salad? Or maybe an exotic flavor in your fries? If you're dining at Washington-area shopping malls, you may want to put down your fork.

Roach and rodent infestations as well as dozens of other critical health violations are common in food courts and restaurants at shopping malls throughout the region.

Health officials say the pest problems are nearly impossible to prevent because clothing stores, electronics outlets and other mall standbys aren't subject to health regulations or inspections, and pests often sneak into malls by hiding in shipping and packaging boxes.

"Malls are a wide-open space, and it's a lot more difficult to manage than if you have a stand-alone structure that you can monitor yourself," said Kevin Chinnia, manager of Montgomery County's health inspectors.

Virginia and Maryland health inspectors cited roughly three-quarters of all mall food vendors for violating critical health regulations during the past year, according to an analysis of health records at 12 local malls conducted by *The Washington Examiner*.

The Food and Drug Administration defines critical violations as those posing an "imminent health hazard" to diners. Such violations range from improper hand washing to serving contaminated food, and, depending on the severity of the infraction, can lead to a restaurant losing its food service license.

Local health officials spotted live rodents, rodent droppings or cockroaches -- dead and alive, clinging to food preparation machines and even to workers -- at more than 10 percent of mall eateries.

Roaches alone can spread 33 types of bacteria -- including *E. coli* and salmonella -- and six types of parasitic worms, according to Missy Henriksen, a spokeswoman for the nonprofit National Pest Management Association.

At Westfield Wheaton Mall in Montgomery County, inspectors during the past year flagged at least seven food establishments for roach or rodent problems, and temporarily closed Bourbon Street Cafe and Greenleaf & Bananas for infestations.

At the Fashion Centre at Pentagon City, a mall employee in June captured video of mice scurrying about the food court. And at Ballston Common Mall, inspectors in March spotted "German cockroaches" crawling around the Texas Bar BQ eatery.

Arlington Health Department supervisor Erica Thompson said malls present a variety of challenges.

"Just the open physical structure increases the potential for a problem," Thompson said. "There's shipment loading and unloading, doors being open and closed, and you've got a lot of different types of facilities in close proximity. So there's a greater potential for there to be a pest issue."

Mall patrons said they are aware of the roach risks.

"I hear they get little cockroaches and hair in the food. Every time I come here I hear something," said Julien Powery, a 20-year-old Wheaton resident who was hanging out near the Westfield Wheaton food court recently.

Both Chinnia and Thompson said their counties' health departments employ a variety of enforcement measures when restaurants fail to meet health regulations.

"If we see a pattern of bad behavior, that's when we become concerned," Thompson said. "We'll bring [the food vendors] into our office for a hearing."

Thompson said continued violations would lead to an eatery losing its license to sell food, and Chinnia said a similar process occurs in Montgomery County.

But both said a single rodent or roach sighting wasn't enough to shut a place down.

"If we find them on the floors or in areas where there's been no contamination, we recommend an exterminator," Chinnia said. "But if we find rodent droppings or roaches on food contact surfaces, in the food or on the food, it's immediate closure."

mheid@washingtonexaminer.com

Health violations at area malls

» Westfield Wheaton

¥ Roughly three-quarters of food vendors have been cited for one or more critical health violations.

¥ Temporarily shut down for roach infestations: Bourbon Street Cafe, Greenleaf & Bananas.

¥ Signs of roach or rodent infestation: P.J. Rice Bistro, Arby's, Texas BBQ Factory, Subway and McDonald's.

» Lakeforest

¥ Roughly 80 percent of food vendors have been cited for one or more critical health violations.

¥ Signs of roach or rodent infestation: Kelly's Cajun Grill, Jumbo Cafe, Texas BBQ Factory, Subway, Silver Diner and Auntie Anne's.

» **White Flint**

¥ Roughly 50 percent of food vendors cited for one or more critical health violations.

¥ Signs of roach or rodent infestation: Dave and Busters, Texas BBQ Factory and Cheesecake Factory.

» **Ballston Common**

¥ Every food vendor cited for one or more critical health violations.

¥ Signs of roach or rodent infestation: Ballston Market, Chevy's, Texas BBQ Factory, Bailey's Pub, Fabian's, Subway and Rock Bottom Brewery.

» **Fashion Centre at Pentagon City**

¥ Every food vendor cited for one or more critical health violations.

¥ Signs of roach or rodent infestation: Harry's Tap Room, Popeye's, Subway, Salad Creations, Yogen Fruz, Kabuki Sushi, Kelly's Cajun Grill, Au Bon Pain and Texas BBQ Factory.

» **Landmark**

¥ Every food vendor cited for one or more critical health code violations.

¥ Roach infestation: Asanka Delight.

¥ American Cafe and Chicken Kabob cited for 11 critical violations each.

» **Tysons Corner Center**

¥ Roughly 80 percent of food vendors have been cited for one or more critical health violations.

» **Fair Oaks**

¥ Roughly 75 percent of food vendors have been cited for one or more critical health violations.

» **Potomac Mills**

¥ Roughly 70 percent of food vendors have been cited for one or more critical health violations.

» **Westfield Montgomery, Dulles Town Center and Manassas Mall**

¥ Half of food vendors were cited for critical health violations.

¥ No signs of roach or rodents have been reported.

Source: All information taken from Montgomery, Arlington, Alexandria, Prince William and Fairfax County health records spanning the last 12 months.

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