



City health district increases scrutiny of stores selling food

By William k. Alcorn (Contact)

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Some neighborhood food service operations have made strides toward cleaning up; others have not.

YOUNGSTOWN — The city health district has stepped up inspections of neighborhood stores that serve food, particularly in the 1st Ward, said Health Commissioner Neil Altman.

The commissioner said his department received complaints from 1st Ward Councilwoman Annie Gillam, head of council's Public Health Committee, and from the Idora Park Block Watch organization about some neighborhood stores being dirty and selling out-of-date and undercooked food.

Health district sanitarians normally inspect food-service operations twice a year to ensure they are in compliance with city ordinances, Altman said.

However, he said after the complaints, inspections of specific stores have been more frequent.

For instance, a sanitarian reported at this week's health board meeting that upon reinspection, he found that while some of the stores have made strides toward cleaning up their operations, others have not.

"We've been doing a lot of work, but there is still a lot to do," the sanitarian told the board.

"We are targeting all food-service operations in the city about which we have received complaints," Altman said.

Generally, sanitarians serve as educators. However, when the food-service operation rejects the education, sanitarians resort to their enforcement role, which could ultimately lead the health board to revoke the store's food license, the commissioner said.

Other complaints about activities that occur outside the stores, which include loitering, drug selling and prostitution, are out of the jurisdiction of the health district. They are matters for law enforcement, Altman said.

There have been improvements in many neighborhood stores. That some neighborhoods have voted those stores dry has been a help, he said.

"Our goal is compliance, and we will know that is achieved when our sanitarians make their inspections and find nothing wrong, and when people in the neighborhoods aren't complaining," Altman said.

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