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FDA finds roaches, listeria at airline caterer

Live and dead roaches 'too numerous to count' at the food facility

The Associated Press

updated 11:22 a.m. ET, Tues., Jan. 5, 2010

DALLAS - A company that prepares food for major airlines says it has cleaned up its Denver kitchen after federal inspectors found live and dead roaches and listeria bacteria at the facility.

The Food and Drug Administration warned the company, LSG Sky Chefs, that it could be barred from selling food to the airlines at the Denver airport if it flunks further inspections.

LSG Sky Chefs said Monday it took the FDA's comments seriously, fired the general manager and head chef, and believes it will pass a follow-up review.

LSG is owned by Deutsche Lufthansa AG, the big German carrier. Its U.S. subsidiary provides food to Delta, American, United and other airlines from 43 kitchens around the country.

According to an FDA letter to the company, inspectors who examined the Denver facility found live and dead roaches "too numerous to count" in several areas of the kitchen, including at least 40 live insects in the silverware station.

The FDA said inspectors saw employees touching food with bare hands or while wearing unwashed gloves. They also noted problems with the building, including water dripping from the ceiling into utensil-cleaning areas and holes in walls that could house insects or vermin.

H. Thomas Warwick Jr., director of the FDA's Denver office, said in an interview that such conditions were more common 10 to 15 years ago but are seen rarely today because of better sanitation practices and more inspections by federal, state and local agencies.

LSG "has been pretty good" over the years, Warwick said. "This one sort of slipped a little. We will be back very shortly."

LSG spokeswoman Beth Van Duyne said the company took the FDA's findings seriously and fired the general manager and executive chef in Denver. When chemical treatments failed to kill listeria found in a kitchen floor drain, the company replaced the pipes and drain, she said. Listeria is a bacteria linked to food-borne illness.

"We make no excuses for this report," Van Duyne said. "We've taken immediate and aggressive actions after we received the initial findings in October. We're confident we'll pass" the follow-up inspection.

Van Duyne said the company hasn't received any reports of airline passengers becoming ill from its food. She said FDA inspectors were back in the Denver building on Monday.

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