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Fort Immediate Release

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Fake Food Inspectors Reappear in Iowa

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FORT MADISON, IA (August 25, 2017) – Fake food inspectors have reappeared in Southeast Iowa, according to report received by the Lee County Health Department. “The fake inspectors appear to be targeting ethnic restaurants in Lee County,” said Rosa Haukedahl, Lee County Health Department Environmental Health Program Director.

The latest scam involves an individual posing as a food inspector who informed the restaurant owner that he will be doing a routine inspection but a processing fee of \$5 needed to be paid immediately by credit card or their license could be at stake. “Unfortunately, at least one owner provided his credit card information to the fake inspector, which resulted in the owner’s account being hacked,” Haukedahl said.

The phony food inspector scam first appeared in Iowa several years ago when individuals posing as health department officials would bully restaurant owners and staff in attempts to obtain personal information, including cell phone numbers, social security numbers and, in several instances, cash. “The fake health inspectors would solicit cash to ‘make violations disappear,” Said Steven Mandernach, Iowa Department of Inspections & Appeals, Food & Consumer Safety Bureau Chief.

Lee County Health Department wants you to know that a legitimate restaurant inspector will never ask an establishment owner or staff for personal information,

will never threaten or intimidate a restaurant employee, and will never attempt to extort money in exchange for fixing a problem, or performe inspections.

“Food safety inspectors at both the state and local level are dedicated individuals who assist owners in the operation of their food service establishments – their role is as much educational as it is regulatory,” Mardenach added.

Restaurant owners and operators are urged to contact their local health department or the Department of Inspections and Appeals for verification of a person’s identity if they have any doubts about an inspector. Food establishment operators who are contacted by anyone claiming to be a food inspector who asks for personal information, such as credit card account numbers, should immediately notify their local police department.

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