



Spring-cleaning before the reopening of the market. WEE TECK HIAN

GEYLANG FOOD POISONING

Hawkers get an earful

Health Minister says cleanliness standard is unacceptable

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ON THE eve of its reopening after two days of spring-cleaning, some 100 stallholders from the Geylang Serai Temporary Market attended a refresher course on cleanliness conducted by officers from the National Environment Agency (NEA).

And according to stallholder Ahman, they received an earful from one of the officers.

“He told us that he has been at the market at 1am for the past few days and back again at 4am – checking our stalls to see that they are clean,” said the 44-year-old chicken-rice seller, whose stall is opposite the Rojak Geylang Serai, which is at the centre of one of Singapore’s worst food poisoning scares.

“He warned us that he will take photos of untidy stalls and instead of giving us a ticket, he’ll summon us to court.”

During the hour-long briefing at the Kampong Ubi Community Centre, stallholders were reminded about house-keeping and hygiene.

They told TODAY that NEA officers had killed some 60 rats yesterday, which pointed to a cleanliness standard that Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan called unacceptable.

“During Sars we were very good, maybe 9/10. After Sars, I think we (have) dropped to maybe 5/10 or worse. You look at toilets. Remember the “Toilet is OK” campaign? At that time it was okay, now it is not so okay,” *Channel NewsAsia* quoted him as saying.

The Minister added that he had written to Environment Minister Yaacob Ibrahim, who is currently out of town, to suggest that the NEA use the opportunity to raise hygiene standards here.

On his part, the Health Minister said he plans to bar any food stall operator with a hygiene rating of C from operating within hospitals. Those currently graded C will be given three months to shape up.

The rojak stall apparently had a C-rating according to reports. Two women have died and six patrons are still recovering in hospitals as more than a 100 people fell ill after eating allegedly contaminated rojak at the temporary market.

Said Ms Siti Hasnah of kueh stall Warong SK 2M: “The NEA officers showed us slides of what they expect from us – cover the food, don’t mix cooked and uncooked food; don’t put pots and pans on the floor. It’s not that we don’t know all these things, but some times people get careless or they only think about themselves and not how (the lack of hygiene) can affect others, so this is a good reminder.”

The temporary market has 369 booths, of which 83 are cooked food stalls.

Mr Ahman, whose stall is opposite the rojak booth, said he has been “feeling bad, sad and worried” ever since the food poisoning incident.

“I feel sad that two people have died, but I’m worried because we all have a business to run,” he said.

The stallholder estimated that his business had dropped by 15 to 20 per cent. “I can’t tell how my business will go now that the centre is re-opening. Weekends are usually good. We’ll see.”