

PRESERVING HEALTH IN MEDFORD

By H. G. Shearer, M. D., City Health Officer.

To the Editor:

Since assuming the duties of health officer of Medford, the writer has made close investigation of the manner in which the laws for preservation of the public health are being observed, with the result that it becomes imperative to place before the people of the city an outline of the most important features of those laws, as well as some information as to the consequences of failure to comply with them.

Most important is the matter of the maintenance of cesspools and surface closets. Hitherto, the lack of sewers and of water for flushing purposes has excused many property owners from complying with the law in this regard, but this excuse no longer exists except in a very few instances. The law is very explicit in this respect. Section 6 of Ordinance No. 311 provides: "No person or persons shall, within the corporate limits of the city of Medford erect or maintain or suffer to be erected or maintained upon any premises owned by him, her or them, any privy or cesspool upon any lot or parcel of land abutting upon any street in which there has been constructed and is being maintained a public sewer." It should be noted that this law forbids the maintenance of such nuisances, so that one already established must be abandoned as soon as sewer facilities are provided.

In cases where no sewer is available and a cesspool is a necessity, it must be constructed in the manner specified in the ordinance, and must be kept sanitary. Section 23 of Ordinance No. 129 provides that "No person who is the owner or occupant or agent of any house, building or premises within the city of Medford, to which a privy belongs or appertains, shall use or keep or permit the same to become in such condition as to cause an unwholesome or offensive smell so as to become a public nuisance."

Of equal importance is the matter of keeping premises free from other filth. This point is covered by section 14 of the same ordinance: "No person shall permit or suffer to accumulate in or about any yard, lot, place or premises, or upon any street, alley or sidewalk adjacent or abutting upon any lot, block or place or premises owned or occupied by him or them, or for which he or they may be agent or agents, within the city limits, refuse vegetables, decayed or decaying substances, garbage or filth of any kind, nor suffer such lot, place or premises to be or remain in such condition as to cause or create offensive smell or atmosphere, thereby to become a public nuisance." And in section 15 it is provided: "Every owner, lessee, tenant and occupant of any stable or place where any horse, cattle, swine or any other animals shall be kept, or of any place wherein manure or any liquid discharge of any such animals shall collect or accumulate shall cause such manure or liquid discharge to be removed to some proper place, and shall at all times keep or cause to be kept such place and stable and the drainage, yard and appurtenances thereof in a cleanly and wholesome condition."

There are two methods of enforcing these ordinances, either or both of which may be resorted to. In the first place, violations may be punished by fine or imprisonment or both, and failure to remedy the fault after punishment will constitute another violation. In addition to this, the health board has power, whether the punishment be inflicted or not, to remedy the fault after notice to the offender, and assess the costs of such remedy against the property, to be collected as a street or other assessment. It is clear that even if a fine be not imposed, the expense incurred by the offender would be much greater than if he complied with the law voluntarily.

In addition to these matters of public concern, there are other provisions of the law directly affecting fewer persons, but of equal importance to the public. The matter of disposal of garbage by restaurants and like places is covered by a special ordinance which provides that "every person conducting or running a restaurant or other place in the city of Medford, where the public are supplied with food, shall maintain at all times a garbage can or cans holding not more than 20 gallons, which can shall be constructed of metal and shall be water tight and fitted with an air-tight lid, and said can shall at all times be kept securely covered with said lid, except when being filled or emptied. Into said can shall be placed and deposited by the person running said restaurant, all slops, garbage and similar material, and the same shall be removed and emptied at proper intervals to be determined by the health officer of the city."

Another important matter is covered by sections 19 and 20 of Ordinance No. 129. Section 19 provides that "It shall be unlawful for any person or persons to carry, convey or haul through or upon the public streets or alleys of the city of Medford any fresh meats of any kind, or any fresh fruits or any vegetables of any kind, offered for sale or intended to be offered for sale within the limits of the city of Medford, unless the same shall be securely covered so as to be protected from flies, dust or any unwholesome matter," and section 20 further provides that "No person or persons shall be allowed to offer for sale, sell or expose for sale any fruit, vegetable, dried meat, butter, honey, bread, cakes, cookies, confectionery or anything intended for human food within the city of Medford, unless it be securely protected from contamination by flies. This does not apply to vegetables or fruits known to be unwholesome or to be unwholesome unless cooked prior to consumption."

Observance of these laws are positively essential to the welfare of the city, and it is amazing that citizens who take pride in the city and seem to be awake to every opportunity for progress and advantage, should be so lax in the observance of what are in reality nature's laws, as well as man-made statutes. Our mayor and council deserve the highest commendation for the passage of these laws, and have provided for the city a set of ordinances on sanitation which cannot be excelled anywhere, but unless these laws are observed, "what's the use?" As the summer approaches and the city becomes more and more congested, the menace grows greater, and unless heroic measures are taken the conditions during the hot weather will be more than serious.

In addition to the observance of these laws, which observance, I may remark, is going to be enforced so long as the present health officer is in office, there are other natural laws of hygiene which must be followed by the people of their own accord, the violation of which brings its own penalty, without any complaint being filed by the health officer.

As an illustration, I will cite the matter of drinking water. So long as our city water supply is open to contamination, which will be until the pipe line is completed, all water should be boiled before drinking, and this also applies to well water where wells are situated anywhere near cesspools. I will also suggest in this connection that no druggist should

under any circumstances use any water in filling a prescription or preparing any remedy to be taken internally until the water has been sterilized. This should be taken for granted, but unfortunately is not always observed. Even when the water line is completed and pure water available, it should not be used until the entire distributing system of the city has been thoroughly flushed, so as to remove all traces of the impure supply.

Care should also be used in the preparation of foods, particularly such foods as tamales and ice cream, which should always be made of fresh materials, and when stale, should be thrown away. Poisoning from the use of stale ingredients in such foods is more common than is usually supposed. All foods which are sold ready to be eaten without further preparation should be prepared in strict conformity with the federal pure food law, which is the result of years of careful research and experiment by men who have made such matters a life study.

In closing, I wish once more to call attention to the importance of keeping the city clean. I do not mean this in the sense it is used in discussing a "clean-up day," although that, too, is very important, but I refer to the actual necessity of cleaning up all premises and disposing in a proper way of all organic matter, refuse and other filth which is a menace to health. This can and will be enforced by the city authorities in all cases where the intelligence of the citizen does not show him the importance of complying with the law voluntarily, but the desired result will be achieved much more quickly, and at much less expense of money and mental effort, if every resident and property owner will simply obey the law.

Once more reiterating that if they don't obey the law voluntarily they will be forced to do so and pay the penalty besides, I thank you for the use of your space for this communication.

J. E. SHEARER,
Health officer.

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