

LOCAL NEWS

Last updated at 1:58 PM on 04/04/08

Opposition wants restaurant inspection reports more accessible **LATEST NEWS**

The Telegram

Opposition Government Services Critic Roland Butler is urging government to make food inspection reports easily accessible to the public.

Last month — in response to a critical report by the Auditor General and an investigation by The Telegram — the province created a new policy that allows anyone to call a Government Services office and, within hours or days, get the latest health inspection report for any provincially-licensed restaurant.

"Unfortunately, the process being used does not promote easy access for the general public," said Butler. "Calling a Government Service centre, leaving a message, and waiting several days for the information to be mailed out simply does not work. It is so difficult to get the information that people are simply not bothering. This is completely unacceptable, especially when government has the ability to put the reports online so that they would be easily accessible to everyone."

In February, The Telegram — under access to information laws — requested certain restaurant names that had previously failed health inspection. The un-named restaurants were highlighted in the auditor general's annual report in released January. Auditor General John Noseworthy criticized the province for delays following up on critical violations and said the system had inadequate controls.

Government Services Minister Kevin O'Brien told The Telegram that, as a result of the AG report, restaurant inspections have moved from a paper-based to a computer-based tracking system. O'Brien also said The Telegram investigation prompted the policy shift to immediate public access to all restaurant reports.

The new policy brings the province closer in line with Vancouver, Edmonton, Hamilton, Ont., Toronto and New Brunswick, which all post restaurant inspection reports online. Last month, Information Commissioner Ed Ring said if the telephone system didn't work, then the province should move to an online system. O'Brien said there are no current plans to do that.