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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Contacts**

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**Fernbridge Café Operator Faces Charges**

The Humboldt County District Attorney's Office filed charges today against Steve Sterbeck, operator of the Fernbridge Market and Café. Sterbeck faces three counts of Operating a Food Facility Without a Valid Permit.

The County of Humboldt Division of Environmental Health requires a food facility permit at any facility where food is stored, prepared, packaged, served or otherwise provided, regardless of whether or not there is a charge for that food. Sterbeck was served a "Notice of Suspension of Food Facility Permit" by the Division of Environmental Health on March 18, 2011 after water tests confirmed high levels of coliform and E coli bacteria in the Café's water. E coli indicates fecal contamination and can cause severe illness and in rare cases, death, in humans. After receiving the notice, Sterbeck was advised by county officials to immediately close the restaurant.

On March 31, 2011, the Café was still open and serving food to the public in direct violation of the suspension notice and Sterbeck was arrested and booked into the Humboldt County Correctional Facility.

Sterbeck was later released by the jail and is scheduled to be arraigned on April 19. If convicted on all counts, he faces up to eighteen months in jail, a fine of up to \$3,000 or both.

"It is important to recognize that an arrest and criminal charges are not, in and of themselves, evidence of guilt," noted Humboldt County District Attorney Paul Gallegos. "All people are entitled to a presumption of innocence. However, the District Attorney's Office and the County's Division of Environmental Health have an obligation to protect the citizens of this community and any visitors who patronize our local businesses. If an individual or business entity appears to be engaging in behavior that endangers people, we have to act to stop that behavior."

Deputy District Attorney Christa McKimmy specializes in environmental and consumer protection and is prosecuting this case.