

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Q: Can I prepare food in my home for sale to others?

A: No. In California all food that is intended to be sold to the public, must be prepared in an approved commercial food preparation facility. Such facilities cannot be connected directly to a private residence.
2. Q: Who needs a Permit to Operate a food facility?

A: Any person, business, or organization that prepares, sells, or gives away food to the public needs a permit issued by the local Health Department. This includes restaurants, markets, liquor stores, coffee shops, bars, mini markets, discount variety stores that sell only packaged foods, schools, bed & breakfasts, catering trucks, ice cream trucks, hot food trucks, food carts, caterers, farmers markets, etc. To obtain such a permit the owner/operator of the food facility must submit an application and fee to the Environmental Health Division and must show that the facility meets minimum requirements of the California Retail Food Code. There are some exceptions (see # 3 and 4 below).
3. Q: Does my church group need a permit to sell food at our annual fundraiser?

A: Possibly not. Non-profit associations may sell or give away food to members or guests, but not the general public, for up to 3 days in a 90 day period (or once per month) without a Permit. However, the persons preparing and selling the food still need to follow safe food handling procedures.
4. Q: Do I need a permit to cater?

A: In most cases, yes. If you regularly prepare and serve food at one meeting hall; prepare or store food at one location for serving later at another location; or provide multi-use utensils that you maintain, then you need a Permit to Operate. If you only act as a cook-for-hire then you would not. A cook-for-hire simply shows up and prepares food at a facility provided by the person who has hired them. A cook-for-hire may not prepare or store food ahead of time, or wash and sanitize multi-use consumer utensils.
5. Q: Who must take and pass an approved food safety test?

A: All food facilities, including mobile food facilities (MFF), must have at least one person who works there, who has passed an approved food safety test. That person may only qualify as meeting this requirement for one food facility. The person who has passed the test need not always be present when the food facility is open but should have trained other people working in the food facility about safe food handling. Exceptions: Markets and MFFs that only sell pre-packaged foods and/or prepare only non-potentially hazardous foods, and temporary food facilities are exempt from the food safety test requirement, but persons working there must still be able to demonstrate adequate knowledge about food safety.
6. Q: How long is a food safety certificate good for and how to I obtain one?

- A: As of July 1, 2007, food safety certificates are good for 5 years. Butte County Environmental Health conducts food safety classes approximately every 2 months with the test given at the end of the class. You may sign-up and pay for the class or test at the Butte County Environmental Health office during normal business hours. Class sizes are limited and do fill-up sometimes. In addition, some private businesses may occasionally provide food safety classes or proctor exams either in this county or in a nearby county.
7. Q: What kind of thermometers do I need at my food facility?
- A: You will probably need several types. You need an accurate, visible refrigerator thermometer in each refrigerator and freezer. Check these at least once per day. You need a visible oven thermometer in all hot holding ovens, hot display cases and heated cabinets. You will also need at least one probe type thermometer for checking food temperatures. The most basic probe thermometer is a bi-metallic probe thermometer with a range of 0-220°F. These thermometers are cheap and sturdy but are not useful for checking cooking temperatures of small or thin foods because approximately 1½ inches of the stem must be placed in the food for accurate readings. For checking cooking temperatures you will need a digital probe thermometer that is sensitive at the tip. All thermometers should be checked on a regular basis for accuracy and must be accurate to ±2°F.
8. Q: What are potentially hazardous foods and why are they important?
- A: Potentially hazardous foods are moist, protein food products that can support rapid growth of harmful bacteria or the slow growth of botulism. Potentially hazardous foods include meat and meat products, poultry, fish, eggs and egg products, cooked vegetables, cooked pasta, cooked rice, dairy products, moist soy products (tofu), raw seed sprouts, cut melons, vegetables covered in oil, and some juices. Such foods are important because they can support the rapid growth of harmful bacteria if the foods are left out in the danger zone (41°F-135°F). Therefore, such foods must be kept refrigerated (41°F or less) or kept hot (135°F or higher) in commercial equipment designed for such use.
9. Q: Why is rapid cooling of potentially hazardous foods important and how is it done?
- A: When hot or warm potentially hazardous foods are cooled, they must pass through the danger zone while cooling. It should NOT be assumed that warm foods placed in a refrigerator immediately get cold. The center portion of warm foods can take a long time to cool, if not done correctly, allowing for the growth of large numbers of harmful bacteria. Most common mistakes in cooling foods include a) cooling at room temperature; b) cooling too much hot food at one time in a refrigerator; c) cooling hot foods in large portion size or in large, deep containers (buckets, large pots, deep pans, etc.). Potentially hazardous foods must be cooled from 135-70°F in two hours and then from 70-41°F in an additional 4 hours. For liquid or semi-solid foods this is normally done with ice baths and/or cooling in shallow, partially covered stainless steel containers in a storage type commercial refrigerator. Do not stack food containers while cooling and leave enough space around the container for good air circulation. Large,

solid foods can be cut-up into smaller pieces, spread out on a pan, and cooled in a storage type commercial refrigerator.

10. Q. How big of a hot water heater do I need and what temperature should it be?
A. Hot water in a food facility must be at least 120°F at the utensil sink faucet. Hot water at handwashing sinks must be at least 100°F. Follow directions on the dishwasher date plate for how hot the incoming water must be for your particular dishwasher. The needed capacity of a hot water heater depends on the peak hot water needs for a particular food facility. The newer tankless water heaters must be sized so that there is an adequate amount (measured in GPM) of hot water at a 60°F temperature rise. Electric tankless water heaters are typically suitable only for low water use facilities.
11. Q. When should food handlers wash their hands?
A. Handwashing is the primary method of preventing the contamination of ready-to-eat foods and utensils with viruses. Hands that have become contaminated from handling raw meats can also cross-contaminate other foods. Therefore, it is very important that food handlers wash their hands before beginning work or changing tasks, and after using restroom, smoking, eating, handling raw food products, general cleaning, handling trash, or any other times that their hands may have become contaminated.
12. Q: What do I need to do to sell food or beverages from a cart?
A: Food carts are typically smaller mobile food facilities that sell either packaged foods or do limited food preparation. Such units must report daily to an approved commissary (usually a restaurant or market with adequate facilities). See the Mobile Food Facility (MFF) requirements in the document section for details. Owners of new MFF's or new owners of older MFF's need to bring their mobile units into the local office of Environmental Health for inspection and permitting.
13. Q: What is a commissary and where can I find one for my mobile food facility?
A: Because MFF's do not have all the facilities that permanent food facility does they must operate in conjunction with an approved commissary. A commissary is used for thorough cleaning of the MFF, cleaning of larger utensils and equipment, storage of food and other supplies, obtaining fresh potable water, dumping waste water, and doing any needed food preparation that cannot be done on the MFF. Butte County Environmental Health does not maintain a list of approved commissaries. Many restaurants and markets, that do food preparation, could qualify as a commissary if they have extra refrigerated and non-refrigerated storage space and they are accessible to a MFF. Ideally the commissary would have provisions for dumping waste water from the MFF, but if it does not you can dump the waste water from your MFF at any RV waste water dump.
14. Q: When do I need to submit plans for a food facility and what do I need to submit?

A: Whenever a new food facility is going to be constructed, an existing food facility is going to be remodeled, or there is a significant change in the menu or method of operation, plans must be submitted to Environmental Health for review and approval. At least one set of scaled plans must be submitted directly to Butte County Environmental Health. See Construction Requirements for a Permanent Food Facility for specifics as to what has to be on the plans. It is recommended that prior to submitting any plans, first contact the local Planning Department (for proper zoning and other planning issues), and the land use section of Environmental Health (or Town of Paradise) if the proposed location is on a individual sewage system or well.

15. Q: Where can I see a copy of the most recent inspection of a retail food facility?

A: All food facilities must make their most recent health inspection available upon request. If the inspection has been lost or is not currently available for some other reason you can view the most current inspections for Butte County permanent food facilities online at this website, or you can request a copy of inspections for Butte County food facilities at the Butte County Environmental Health office.

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