

Mobile Food Service Operations and Mobile Retail Food Establishments



Questions and Answers

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Mobile Food Service Operations

What is a mobile food service operation or a mobile retail food establishment?

A mobile food service operation is a food service operation that is operated from a movable vehicle, a portable structure, or a watercraft, and that routinely changes location. If the operation remains at any one location for more than forty consecutive days, the operation is no longer a mobile food service operation. Moving it a few feet or pulling it around the block and returning to the same location does not count. Routinely means regularly, in this context. Mobile food service operations typically serve food in individual portions.

A mobile retail food establishment is similar to a mobile food service operation except that it typically sells food in bulk quantities (e.g. a candy stand, frozen meat vendor, etc.).

For our purposes, both mobile food services and mobile retail food establishments will go by the term, “mobile food service operation” in this document and must conform to the same requirements.

How are mobile food service operation licenses obtained?

The operator of a mobile food service operation shall make application for a license to the board of health of the health district in which the operator's business headquarters are located. The operator of a mobile food service operation whose business address is located outside of Ohio shall make application for a license to the board of health having jurisdiction over the operator's first Ohio location in any one licensing year. A food service license issued to an operator of a mobile food service operation by an approved health district, as provided in Chapter 3717 of the Ohio Revised Code (ORC), shall be recognized by all other licensors in this state.

Temporary food service licenses will only be issued for a mobile food service operation if proof can be shown that the event the license is issued for is truly a temporary situation. Examples would be the rental of a trailer by the Boy Scouts to serve food at a local festival. Mobile food service operations from other Ohio counties will be expected to have a mobile food service license from that county when they come to Shelby County.

Are plans required to be reviewed prior to issuing a license?

Yes. Plans must be submitted to the licensor which include the following: a layout of the interior (drawn to scale) showing the location of all equipment, plumbing fixtures, entrances/exits and serving windows; a list of equipment makes and model numbers; the surfaces/interior finishes of floors, walls, ceilings, and countertops; a lighting plan; the type, location, and capacity of the water supply and waste water tanks; other portions of the premises in which the operation is conducted such as additional storage units and exterior cooking equipment; and a menu. All equipment must be commercial equipment

certified by an independent testing agency such as NSF. If extensive alterations are made to an already licensed mobile food service operation, new plans must be submitted and approved by the licensor. Please be aware that, as of December 15, 2017, all proposed mobile food service operations must also submit plans to the local fire authority to ensure basic fire safety measures are met prior to licensure by the local board of health.

What items are required to be placed on the back of the mobile food service operation license?

The menu, the layout of the operation, and any restrictions or conditions limiting the types of food that may be prepared or served (based on the equipment and facilities) are required to be placed on the back of each license by the licensor.

What information is required to be placed on the outside of the mobile unit?

The name of the operation, the city of origin, and the area code and telephone number of the business must be conspicuously displayed on the exterior of the mobile unit. The name and city of origin must be displayed with individual lettering at least three inches high and one inch wide.

What inspections are required for a mobile food service operation?

Once a completed license application and the licensing fee are received, an inspection will be completed by the licensing health department before the operation's first event. The license will then be issued if the mobile food service operation is in compliance with Chapter 3717 of the ORC and the rules adopted thereunder. A renewal license will be issued upon the receipt of a completed license application and the licensing fee. One standard inspection per licensing year is required to be conducted by the licensor. In Shelby County, this inspection may take place when the renewal license is issued or sometime thereafter during the license period.

During the licensing year, a mobile food service operation may be subject to additional inspections by other local health departments having jurisdiction over the mobile food service operation's location. Whenever an inspection is conducted by a health district other than the licensing district, a copy of the inspection report must be sent to the licensing health district.

Can mobile food service operation licenses be revoked or suspended?

Yes. If the license holder fails to correct documented violations of Chapter 3717 of the ORC or the rules adopted thereunder, the license may be suspended. If a violation presents a clear and immediate danger to the public health, the license may be suspended without giving written notice or the opportunity to make corrections. The licensor that issued the license or the licensor for the health district in which the operation is being operated may suspend the license.

When a license is suspended, the licensor that suspended the license shall hold the license until the suspension is lifted and the licensor receives written notice of the next location at which the licensee proposes to operate the mobile food service operation.

Revoking a mobile food service operation license can only be accomplished by the health district issuing the license.

An appeal on a suspension or a revocation must be made to the licensor that suspended or revoked the license.

What types of food may be served in a mobile food service operation?

Any food may be served as long as the menu and the equipment and facilities needed are consistent with the information on the back of the license.

All food shall be obtained from sources complying with Ohio laws and regulations. See section 3717-1-3.1 of the Ohio Uniform Food Safety Code or contact the Health Department for more details.

What are the temperature requirements for storing, cooking, holding, cooling, and reheating food?

All time/temperature controlled for safety (TCS) foods are to be maintained at an internal temperature of 41°F or below or at an internal temperature of 135°F or above during storage, holding/display, and transportation.

The following are common cooking temperature requirements for raw animal foods:

- Poultry shall be cooked to heat all parts to at least 165°F for fifteen seconds;
- Comminuted (ground) meats, mechanically tenderized or injected meats, and pooled eggs for hot holding shall be cooked to heat all parts to at least 155°F for fifteen seconds;
- Fish, meat, and eggs cooked for immediate service shall be cooked to heat all parts to at least 145°F for fifteen seconds;
- All raw animal foods cooked in a microwave oven shall be rotated or stirred midway through the cooking process to compensate for uneven distribution of heat, covered to retain surface moisture, heated to 165°F, and allowed to stand for two minutes after cooking to obtain temperature equilibrium.
- For additional cooking temperature requirements, see section 3717-1-3.3 of the Ohio Uniform Food Safety Code.

TCS foods shall be cooled from 135°F to 70°F within two hours, and from 70°F to 41°F or less within another four hours. Cooked and cooled TCS foods that are reheated for hot holding shall be reheated to 165°F for fifteen seconds within two hours.

What equipment is necessary to maintain food temperatures in a mobile food service operation?

This will vary with the type of operation. Some operations will need both hot and cold holding facilities, while others may need only cold holding facilities. All refrigeration and hot holding equipment shall be provided with a numerically scaled thermometer, accurate to plus or minus 3°F (1.5°C), located to measure the air temperature in the warmest part of the equipment. All thermometers shall be designed and located to be easily readable.

*******Remember: All equipment must be commercial equipment!*******

A metal stem thermometer, accurate to plus or minus 2°F (1°C), and scaled in no more than 2°F increments, shall be provided and used to assure the attainment and maintenance of food temperatures. A temperature measuring device with a suitable small-diameter probe that is designed to measure the temperature of thin masses shall be provided and readily accessible to accurately measure the temperature in thin foods such as meat patties and fish filets.

What is the proper way to thaw foods?

There are only **four** acceptable ways to thaw TCS foods:

1. Under refrigeration, not to exceed 41°F
2. Completely submerged under cold, running water with sufficient velocity to agitate and float loose particles into the overflow
3. In a microwave, if the food will be cooked immediately after thawing
4. As part of the cooking process itself.

How are foods to be protected in a mobile food service operation?

Foods shall be protected at all times, including while being stored, prepared, held, displayed, or transported, from potential contamination. Potential sources of contamination include, but are not limited to dust, insects, rodents, unclean equipment and utensils, unnecessary handling, coughs and sneezes, hair, overhead leakage or dripping from condensation.

Food shall be stored at least six inches above the floor.

Food shall be stored in packages, covered containers, or wrappings.

Raw animal foods shall be stored in a manner that will not lead to cross contamination of ready-to-eat foods or cross-contamination of raw animal foods requiring a lower cooking temperature.

Ice used to cool other foods shall not be used for human consumption.

Packaged food shall not be stored in contact with water or ice if the food is subject to the entry of water.

Raw fruits and vegetables shall be thoroughly washed with water before being cooked or served. Prior to washing, raw fruits and vegetables shall be separated from ready-to-eat foods.

Working containers of hard to identify foods shall be labeled with their common name for ease of identification and to prevent misuse.

A food employee shall not use a utensil more than once to taste a food that is being sold or served.

Equipment food contact surfaces and utensils shall be constructed of safe materials, be durable, smooth, and easily cleanable, and be maintained in a good state of repair.

All equipment food contact surfaces and utensils shall be clean to sight and touch.

How must food be handled in mobile food service operations?

Except when washing fruits and vegetables, ready-to-eat foods may only be handled using single-use non-latex gloves, deli tissue, utensils, etc. Food employees shall minimize bare hand contact with exposed food that is not in a ready-to-eat form.

How are in-use dispensing utensils to be stored?

In-use food prep and dispensing utensils shall be stored in a clean, protected location (and cleaned at least every four hours if used with TCS foods), in the food with handles out of food; in running water with sufficient velocity to agitate and float off loose particle into an overflow; or in water held at 135°F.

What is required of all employees when working in a mobile food service operation?

All employees are to be healthy, have clean clothing, have their hair restrained, and wash their hands and arms as required by section 3717-1-2.2 of the Ohio Uniform Food Safety Code. Except for a plain wedding band, jewelry may not be worn when preparing food. Unless wearing gloves, a food employee may not wear fingernail polish or artificial nails when working with exposed food.

Smoking, eating, and drinking (except from a closed beverage container with a straw) is not permitted in the mobile food service operation.

The license holder shall be or shall designate a person-in-charge who has applicable knowledge of the Ohio Uniform Food Safety Code and of the mobile food service operation. The person-in-charge shall be present during all hours of operation.

A written procedure for employees to follow when responding to vomiting or diarrheal events inside the mobile must be available at all times. In addition, persons-in-charge must ensure that all employees are informed in a verifiable manner of their responsibility to report to the person-in-charge information about their health as it relates to diseases that are transmissible through food.

What are the requirements for hand and ware washing facilities in a mobile?

All mobile food service operations handling exposed foods are required to have proper hand washing facilities. This would include 100-110°F water under pressure, soap, paper towels, a waste can, and signage reminding employees to wash hands.

A three compartment sink is required on all mobiles for washing utensils and equipment. The first compartment would be used for detergent and water, the middle compartment would be used for a clear rinse, and the last compartment would be used for the sanitizer solution. The sink compartments shall be large enough to immerse at least half of the largest utensil/equipment and shall have self-draining drainboards on both ends. All utensils and equipment shall be air dried in a self-draining position.

How are sanitizers to be used?

Equipment food contact surfaces and utensils shall be sanitized before use after cleaning. An approved sanitizer (typically chlorine or quaternary ammonia) is required and test strips for the sanitizer used are to be available to monitor the concentration of the sanitizing solution while in use. If you are using chlorine or quaternary ammonium chloride as a sanitizer in a three compartment sink, the sanitizer concentrations and solution temperatures should be as follows:

Chlorine solution: 50-100 ppm (>75°F)

Quaternary ammonium chloride solution: 200-400ppm (according to instructions)

If other types of sanitizers or detergent/sanitizers are used, follow the manufacturer's directions and make sure that they are designed so that a final rinse is not required.

*******In all cases, follow the manufacturer's instructions! *******

Store wiping cloths in a solution of approved sanitizer at the recommended concentration. Change the solution frequently and launder the cloths daily.

How often are equipment and utensils in a mobile operation required to be cleaned?

In use equipment, food contact surfaces, and utensils shall be washed, rinsed and sanitized at intervals throughout the day based on the food temperature, type of food, and amount of food particle accumulation. Please see section 3717-1-4.5 of the Ohio Uniform Food Safety Code for details.

Non-food contact surfaces of equipment shall be cleaned at a frequency necessary to preclude the accumulation of soil residues.

How are cleaned and sanitized equipment and utensils to be stored and handled?

Cleaned and sanitized equipment and utensils shall be stored at least 6 inches off the floor, in a clean, dry location not exposed to splash, dust, or other contamination.

All cleaned and sanitized utensils and equipment shall be handled in a way to prevent contamination of the food and lip contact surfaces. Single service items such as knives, spoons and forks that are not pre-wrapped shall be dispensed with the handle of the utensil to the consumer. Straws for consumer self-dispensing shall be in their original individual wrapper or obtained from an approved dispenser.

*******Reuse of single-service articles is prohibited!*******

What are the water requirements in a mobile food service operation?

All water used in a mobile shall be from an approved source such as commercially bottled water, a public water system, or a private water system that has been annually tested for coliform bacteria and found safe. It shall be of sufficient capacity to meet peak demands. Running water under pressure must be provided to all fixtures while in operation.

If using a hose connected to a hose bibb, all mobiles shall be equipped with an approved back-flow device (ASSE 1012 or 1024) to prevent possible contamination of the public water supply. The hose shall be approved for potable water use (NSF standard 61 or equivalent) and not a standard garden hose. These hoses usually have a blue stripe on them and state they are for drinking water.

Mobile food service operations using fresh water holding tanks shall comply with section 3717-1-5.2 of the Ohio Uniform Food Safety Code.

All plumbing shall be maintained in good repair.

How is the sewage disposed of in mobile food service operations?

An onboard holding tank or portable sewage dolly shall be used if a direct sewage connection is not available. The tank shall be at least 15 percent larger in capacity than the fresh water storage tank, sloped to a drain opening at least one inch in diameter, be equipped with a shut-off valve, and be emptied in an acceptable sanitary manner at an approved waste servicing area or by a registered sewage transport vehicle. If a hose is connected to a sewer or dump site, it shall be connected so there is no spillage of waste. This hose may only be used for sewage and wastewater.

All sinks shall drain into the sewage holding tank, portable dolly, or other approved sewage system.

Drains of equipment use to hold food should not be directly connected to the sewage holding tank to prevent possible contamination in the event of sewage back up.

What facilities are required to dispose of garbage and trash?

Trash shall be stored in containers that are leak proof, durable, cleanable, nonabsorbent, insect and rodent proof, and that have tight fitting lids. Trash cans are to be covered when not in use and dumped in approved dumpsters or other approved facilities when full to prevent insect and rodent attraction.

What are the requirements of floors, walls, ceilings, and other facilities in a mobile?

All floors, walls, and ceilings are to be constructed of materials that are easily cleanable, smooth, durable, and non-absorbent.

If mats are used on the floors, they shall be removable and easily cleanable. Carpeting may not be used.

Floors, wall and ceilings shall be maintained in good repair and kept clean at all times.

If necessary to keep the interior of the mobile free of excessive heat, steam, vapors, condensation, smoke, or fumes, mechanical ventilation shall be provided. Ventilation shall be designed to prevent the contamination of food, the food contact surfaces of equipment, and utensils.

The exterior construction of a mobile unit shall be of weather and insect resistant materials. The interior of the unit shall be protected from insects and weather blown contaminants by the use of tight fitting windows, doors, and screens.

What are the lighting requirements in a mobile food service operation?

Permanently installed fixed artificial light sources shall be installed to provide at least fifty foot-candles of light on all food preparation surfaces and at equipment or utensil washing work levels. The lights shall be properly shielded or shatter proof bulbs used to protect against broken glass falling onto food, equipment, utensils, etc.

Storage vehicles shall be equipped with lighting that provides a minimum of ten foot-candles.

Infrared or other heat lamps shall be protected against breakage by a shield surrounding and extending beyond the bulb, leaving only the face of the bulb exposed.

How are chemicals and personal belongings to be stored in a mobile food service operation?

All chemicals needed to operate the mobile shall be properly labeled and stored and applied to prevent the contamination of food, equipment, utensils, etc. Only those chemicals needed for the operation of the mobile are permitted and shall be used according to Ohio laws and regulations.

Personal medications, clothing, etc. are to be stored so as not to contaminate food, equipment, utensils, and single service items.

Can a mobile food service operation be used as sleeping or living quarters?

Under no circumstances shall a mobile unit be used as either sleeping or living quarters.

This booklet is intended to be a brief outline of some of the requirements needed for a mobile food service operation. It is in no way to be construed as being all the requirements needed to operate a mobile food service operation or mobile retail food establishment. The local health department, Chapter 3717 of the Ohio Revised Code and Chapter 3717-1 of the Ohio Administrative Code (Ohio Uniform Food Safety Code) should be consulted to assure that all applicable criteria have been addressed.

Contact your local health department at:

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