

## Mobile Food And Pushcart Guidance

The Rules Governing the Sanitation of Restaurants and Other Foodhandling Establishments and North Carolina's Food Code Manual set forth requirements for the operation of food handling establishments, including specific requirements for operating mobile food units and pushcarts, as well as general rules governing food handling. This article is designed to serve as a general reference for operators who want to learn about the building and operation of a mobile food unit or a pushcart before selling food from these units. Before beginning the construction or operation of such units, an application must be submitted to the local health department. The rules are available at <http://www.deh.enr.state.nc.us/rules.htm>.

Mobile food units or pushcarts must be operated in conjunction with a permitted restaurant, food stand, or commissary and must report daily for supplies, cleaning, and service to that restaurant or commissary. Additionally, prior to constructing a pushcart or mobile food unit, a person must submit an application for review. A permit to operate can be issued to the operator once all conditions in Section.2600 and North Carolina's Food Code Manual have been satisfied. The Environmental Health Section will inspect the units in the county of operation. The operator must keep the Health Department updated regarding dates and locations of operation so that inspections may be made. The permit for any unit not inspected during any inspection period will be placed on inactive status. If a unit does not comply with the provisions of the rules, such as returning to the permitted restaurant or commissary on each day of operation, the permit for the unit may be suspended. It is recommended to apply for a permit and receive approval before building or buying.

The permit shall be posted to be visible to the public.

The grade card shall be posted and visible to the public at all times.

Employees shall comply with the requirements in Subpart 2-201 of the Food Code as amended by Rule 2652 of this Section. A person in charge (PIC) must take and pass a certified food protection class.

All food must be obtained from an approved source.

All potentially hazardous food (time/temperature control for safety food) shall be maintained at temperatures as required in Chapter 3 of the Food Code. A metal stem-type thermometer accurate to 1°C (2°F) shall be available to check food temperatures.

All garbage and other solid waste shall be stored and disposed of in an approved manner.

Seating cannot be provided for customers.

Equipment and utensils shall meet the requirements in Parts 4-1 and 4-2 of the Food Code as amended by Rule .2654 of this Section. The only customer self-service allowed would be condiments, such as catsup and mustard from squeeze or pump bottles or individually packaged condiments. Coolers can only be used for ice for drinks, canned or bottled beverages, or to transport food to the unit. Once the unit is set up, all food must be stored.

Some essential specific requirements for mobile food units

The mobile food unit shall be constructed and arranged so that food, drink, utensils, and equipment will not be exposed to insects, dust, and other contamination. Food or equipment exposed to the public, dust, or insects shall be protected by glass or otherwise, on the front, top, and ends, and exposed only as much as may be necessary to permit the handling and serving of food. Protection against flies shall be provided by screening or effective use of fans.

A servicing area shall be provided at the restaurant. Potable water connections shall be installed to protect the water and equipment from contamination. All sewage shall be discharged to an approved sewage disposal system.

The only food item that can be prepared on an open-air grill is a hot dog from a pushcart. Even this must be protected from contamination on the top and sides. Any other food items must be prepared inside of a mobile food unit.

#### **Construction of Mobile Food Unit**

The mobile food unit must have a potable water system under pressure. The system must provide hot and cold water sufficient for all preparation, handwashing, and cleaning requirements for a full day of operation. Water heating facilities must be provided. The water inlet must be protected from contamination and different from the sewage outlet.

Exterior surfaces shall be of weather-resistant materials.

Indoor floor, walls, and ceiling construction shall be smooth, durable, and easily cleanable.

The mobile food unit shall be constructed to prevent contamination of food, drink, utensils, and equipment.

Non-food contact surfaces shall be free of unnecessary ledges, projections, and crevices. These should also be designed and constructed to allow easy cleaning and facilitate maintenance.

A handwashing sink with hot and cold water with a combination supply faucet shall be provided.

Windows, doors, and vents shall be protected by screens, air curtains, or other effective means.

**Equipment**

At least a one-compartment sink of sufficient size to submerge, wash, rinse, and sanitize utensils with backsplash protection shall be provided. Test strips are needed to check the concentration of the sanitizer.

Drainboards, utensil racks, or tables shall be provided enough to accommodate all soiled and cleaned utensils.

A ventilation hood is required if cooking.

Food contact surfaces shall be smooth, free of breaks, open seams, cracks, chips, pits, and similar imperfections. These surfaces shall have smooth welds and joints; and be accessible for cleaning.

Equipment shall be used in accordance with the manufacturer's intended use and ANSI certified.

Non-food contact surfaces of equipment exposed to splash, spillage, or other food soiling or that require frequent cleaning shall be constructed of a corrosion-resistant, nonabsorbent, and smooth material.

A hot and cold water handwash sink, a combination faucet, and soap and towels must be provided.

**Plumbing**

The mobile food unit must have a potable water system under pressure. The system must provide hot and cold water sufficient for all preparation, handwashing, and cleaning requirements for a full day of operation. Water heating facilities must be provided. The water inlet must be protected from contamination and different from the sewage outlet.

Potable water system provided under pressure. The hose used for conveying drinking water to fill the water tank shall be safe, durable, corrosion-resistant, nonabsorbent; resistant to disrepair and decomposition; and clearly identified to be used for drinking water only.

If a vent for the water tank is provided for it to work properly, it shall terminate downward direction and shall be covered with a 16 mesh to 1-inch screen or equivalent or a protective filter.

Water heating facilities shall be provided.

Sewage disposal shall be provided. The sewage tank must be at least 15% larger capacity than the water supply tank.

The waste connection shall be located lower than the water inlet connection to preclude contamination of the potable water system.

The shut-off valve must be provided on the waste tank.

**Essential specific requirements for Pushcarts**

Only hot dogs shall be prepared, handled, or served from a pushcart. Foods prepared, pre-portioned, and individually wrapped in a restaurant or commissary may be sold from a pushcart, but they must be delivered to the customer unopened and not be opened or otherwise handled by the operator.

The pushcart and all equipment used on the mobile food unit shall be of commercial manufacture and approved by a third-party certifier, such as **NSF**. The pushcart shall be NSF certified.

Food and utensils on the cart exposed to the public or dust or other contamination shall be protected by glass or otherwise, on the front, top, and ends, and exposed only as much as may be necessary to permit the handling and to serve the hot dogs.

If pre-portioned, wrapped foods are sold, the operator shall provide documentation to the Department that demonstrates the equipment's ability to hold proper temperatures for these items. Any food of this nature shall be labeled with the name of the restaurant or commissary at which it was prepared, the food item's name, and the time and date of expiration. Any food that is left shall be discarded at the end of the day. It cannot be re-used.

Pushcarts shall not allow customer self-service, nor shall they provide seating.

Pushcart must also provide another protective covering over the steamer containers other than the lids.