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# Mobile Food Premises Guidelines

## January 2023

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In Collaboration with:

BC Ministry of Health and the Five Regional Health Authorities:  
Vancouver Coastal, Fraser, Island, Northern, and the First Nations Health Authority



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## Purpose

To provide direction to operators for the design, construction and operation of mobile food premises. For temporary events and units operating less than 14 days total in a calendar year, please see the appropriate temporary event guideline for your local Health Authority.

As outlined in the *BC Food Premises Regulation*, a person must not construct or make alterations to food premises (including mobile units) unless plans and specifications for the construction or alteration have been approved by a health officer. The design and construction of mobile food premises units must be appropriate to ensure food safety over extended periods of food production and service. Mobile food premises units must be built using materials that would be similar to what would be expected in a restaurant. Before starting the operation of a mobile food premises unit, a valid Operating Permit or Written Approval must be obtained, as outlined in [Table 1](#) below.

## Definitions

**Base of Operation:** Also known as a commissary, an approved location where food preparation, food storage and cleaning for the mobile food premises unit are carried out.

**Potentially Hazardous Food:** A food that will support the growth of pathogenic micro-organisms or the production of their toxins.

**Non-Potentially Hazardous Food:** A food that generally will not support the growth of pathogenic microorganisms or the production of their toxins.

**Mobile Food Premises:** Any vehicle, cart or other self-contained movable structure from which food intended for public consumption is prepared/processed and/or served/provided to the public with or without charge.

**Self-Contained Unit:** All surfaces and equipment required for the processing, storage and display of food products that are contained within, physically attached and part of the whole unit.

## Types of Mobile Food Premises Units

### ***Type A – Limited Food Handling/Dispensing Only***

A mobile unit that dispenses pre-packaged products or prepares and dispenses unpackaged, nonpotentially hazardous products such as popcorn, cotton candy, mini-donuts, nachos (chips and cheese sauce), pretzels, churros OR units that only dispense (i.e., do not prepare) unpackaged hot and cold foods and beverages, such as pizza and baked goods.

### ***Type B – Restricted Menu/Limited Processing and Food Handling***

A mobile unit that prepares and dispenses non-potentially hazardous foods and potentially hazardous foods such as hot dogs, smokies, precooked hamburgers, sandwiches, soups, chilies, falafels, wraps, and specialty coffee. Cooking raw proteins (e.g., meat) is not permitted.

### ***Type C – Extended/Complex Food Processing and Handling***

A mobile unit that prepares and dispenses any type of food and any level of food handling, including cooking raw proteins (e.g., donairs, curries, stir-fry, etc).

### ***Units that Dispense Pre-packaged Foods Only***

Units that only dispense pre-packaged foods, plain tea and coffee, pre-packaged sandwiches, frozen packaged seafood and other like products:

1. Require approval from the local Health Authority.
2. Do not require a hand sink or ware washing sinks.
3. Are recommended to have a food safety plan, sanitation plan, and food handler training.

## Operational Requirements

### Plans

Owners/operators of mobile units must submit scale drawings showing the layout of all equipment, the plumbing design and construction details for approval by the local Health Authority **BEFORE** construction of a new mobile unit and base of operation. If looking to purchase and/or renovate an existing mobile unit, owners/operators should discuss these plans with their local Environmental Health Officer.

### Approval/Permit to Operate

All units require either an approval to operate or a permit to operate prior to commencing operation (see [Table 1](#)). Permits are to be displayed on the mobile unit in a visible location. Mobile food premises units that require a permit to operate are identified in [Table 1](#). An application must be submitted and the annual permit fee, if required, must be paid before a permit will be issued. Approvals and permits are non-transferable. If an owner has more than one mobile unit, each unit must receive a separate approval/permit.

### Base of Operations

1. A base of operations must meet the requirements of the *Food Premises Regulation*. A food service establishment, approved commercial kitchen, warehouse, residential house (must be separate from living space, approved by the Environmental Health Officer and meet applicable zoning by-laws) *MAY* be acceptable as a base of operation.

Some local governments may restrict the use of residential premises as a base of operation – contact your local Environmental Health Officer. Garages may be acceptable provided the facilities meet the above requirements and are physically separated from the rest of the garage and its contents. Food stored in a garage may not need to be in a completely separate room, as long as the storage compartment (cupboard, freezer, etc.) protects the food from contamination and non-compatible materials are not present (e.g., gas and propane).

2. The base of operation may accommodate one mobile unit or be shared by a number of mobile operations.
3. The following conditions apply:
  - ✓ The area must be approved for the intended use by the local Health Authority.
  - ✓ As required, it is equipped with mechanical refrigeration for potentially hazardous foods.
  - ✓ As required, it is provided with space and equipment necessary for safe food processing, including a dedicated hand wash station.
  - ✓ All surfaces are smooth, non-absorbent and easily cleanable.
  - ✓ As required, a suitable metal two compartment sink is present with hot and cold running potable water.
  - ✓ Cleaning and unit storage areas are separate from food storage/processing areas.
  - ✓ If the base of operations is shared (multiple tenants in one commissary), storage areas for each tenant should be identified and secured to prevent tampering and contamination.

- ✓ There should be access to a potable water supply for filling the mobile food unit potable water storage tank. If there is not, the potable water source must be documented.
  - ✓ There should be access to wastewater disposal to empty the mobile food unit wastewater tank. If there is not, the location(s) where the waste water is disposed of must be documented in the sanitation plan.
  - ✓ Storage of propane tanks, gas tanks, generators are to be separate from food storage/processing areas.
4. When it is not possible to store the mobile food premises unit in/at the base of operation, the mobile unit must be:
    - ✓ Stored in a structure that protects it from contamination and damage.
    - ✓ Covered with a washable, waterproof cover (e.g., vinyl or similar material) to protect it from contamination.
    - ✓ The above does not apply to mobile food premises units that are completely enclosed with a floor, walls and ceiling.
  5. The Health Authority may determine that a self-contained mobile unit has the ability to operate without a base of operations if the unit contains all the space, equipment, and utensils that the base of operations would provide.

## Physical Requirements

1. A mobile food premises unit must be a permanently assembled/affixed/built facility.
2. All food contact surfaces and equipment (including walls and ceiling where present) must be constructed of materials that are smooth, easily cleanable and impervious to moisture. The materials should be suitable for their intended purpose, durable and free from any noxious substance.
3. Units with driving areas should have reasonable separation between the driver area and the food preparation area. This may be a solid wall/door, a barrier/divider, or adequate space.
4. All openings in enclosed units, other than service windows, should be fitted with screens.
5. As required, refrigerated storage shall be provided to ensure all cold potentially hazardous foods are maintained at 4°C or colder.
6. Adequate storage space shall be provided on the unit for dry goods and other non-potentially hazardous foods. Cleaners, sanitizers, and non-compatible equipment (e.g., generators) must be stored separately from food.
7. All light fixtures shall have protective covers. Lighting must be adequate to allow for safe preparation and sanitation.
8. An independent power source (e.g., generator) of sufficient capacity may be required based on the nature of food service, size of the unit, and duration of operation
9. Units must be equipped with a hot water heater or similar device that provides active heating of the hot water supply. Heaters must be sufficiently sized to provide hot water that meets the demands of the operation and should be independent of other equipment on board.



10. Gas, propane and electrical connections must be certified or reviewed by the Technical Safety BC or other appropriate agency. Environmental Health Officers should not withhold health approval solely due to lack of a review by Technical Safety BC. Applicants may be referred to the approving authority and outstanding concerns about gas or electrical works may be forwarded to Technical Safety BC or other appropriate agency.

## Potable Water Storage Tanks and Water Supply

1. The size of the potable water tanks should comply with [Table 1](#).
2. Fresh water holding tanks must be filled with potable water from an approved source.
3. Water supply systems should be mechanically pressurized.
4. The entire water supply must be immediately available (e.g., drawn from a single source without needing to switch tanks).
5. Hoses or water lines used to fill the water tank must be designated for potable water use and stored in such a manner as to prevent contamination.
6. Appropriate back flow prevention shall be in place whenever the mobile is connected to a potable water supply.
7. Water tank cleaning protocols must be outlined in the Sanitation Plan.

## Ware Washing Sinks

1. The number of sinks required on a mobile food premises unit is dependent on the type of unit and must comply with [Table 1](#).
2. All ware washing sinks should be metal and of sufficient size and volume needed for the washing and sanitizing of serving and cooking utensils used on the mobile unit. The minimum size of any sink should be 25 cm x 25 cm x 14 cm deep; however, ware washing sinks must be large enough to submerge the largest utensil/implement used on the unit.
3. All sinks must be connected to a potable water source and a waste water tank.

## Handwashing Stations

All handwashing stations must be:

- ✓ Connected to the potable water and wastewater systems of the mobile unit.
- ✓ Capable of supplying hot and cold water that is adequate in quantity and pressure.
- ✓ Readily accessible to employees and located in every area where food is prepared or processed.
- ✓ Supplied with liquid hand soap and single-use towels in suitable dispensers.
- ✓ Designed to allow for both hands to be washed at the same time under flowing water.

## Waste Water Disposal

1. The wastewater holding tank must be enclosed and be 25% larger than the capacity of the potable water tank.

2. There must be a drain in the tank suitably located to allow for easy draining into a sanitary sewer or other approved waste water collection point.
3. Wastewater shall be disposed into an approved location.
4. When mobile food premises units are connected directly to an approved water system, instead of potable water holding tanks, the unit must also be connected directly to a sanitary sewer or have other means of preventing backup or overflow of waste water.

## Temperature Control

1. If potentially hazardous foods are sold or stored on a mobile food premises unit, the mobile unit must have equipment to maintain these foods at 4°C or colder or at 60°C or warmer.
2. All cold held potentially hazardous foods should be stored under mechanical refrigeration. All refrigeration equipment must be equipped with individual thermometers.
3. An accurate, tip sensitive probe thermometer must be available and used to monitor cooking, reheating, and hot holding temperatures.
4. Type A mobile units that dispense potentially hazardous foods must receive the foods at 4°C or colder or at 60°C or warmer.

## Ventilation

1. Every enclosed mobile food premises unit in which foods are deep fried or where extensive grease and vapours are produced during cooking must be equipped with a ventilation system adequate to prevent the accumulation of smoke and grease.
2. Adequate fire suppression may be required to meet local bylaws where gas fired equipment is present or deep fat frying is performed. Contact your local municipality or fire department for information.

## Food Preparation and Protection

1. For units that are not fully enclosed, protection should include overhead cover to protect food from weather elements and the risk of contamination from birds or other overhead risks. Foods may require direct covers to prevent contamination from dust, flies or other contaminants.  
Cooking equipment (e.g., barbeque, flat top grill) that is not permanently attached to the mobile unit may be used to supplement existing equipment provided:
  - a) A hand washing station is located adjacent to or within reasonable proximity to the cooking station (e.g., 4.5 m/15 ft).
  - b) The local Health Authority has approved the use of the auxiliary equipment.Barriers may be required to minimize the risk of food contamination and injury to patrons.

2. Food, utensils and all food related articles (cups, disposable dishes, etc.) must be stored off the floor and protected from contamination.
3. All portioned, prepackaged foods must be packaged in food grade material and clearly marked with the date and place of preparation.
4. Condiments should be in individual packages, dispensed from a squeeze or pump container or from a container with a self-closing lid.
5. Only single-use customer utensils may be provided unless otherwise approved by the local Health Authority.

## Approved Sources of Food

1. All foods and beverages, including ice, must be from approved sources or a premises that has obtained approval from an appropriate government agency.
2. Where foods require pre-cooking, processing or other forms of preparation before storing on the mobile unit, the work must only be conducted in approved food premises.
3. Trans fat content of food must meet the limits set out in the *Public Health Impediments Regulation*.
4. No food is to be prepared in a private dwelling, except for those areas that have been approved as the unit's base of operations.

## Cleaning and Sanitizing

1. All food contact surfaces and equipment must be washed, rinsed, sanitized and air dried after use. The following sanitizing solutions are acceptable:
  - a. 100-200 ppm available chlorine.
  - b. 200 ppm quaternary ammonium.
  - c. 12.5 ppm available iodine at a temperature of less than 45°C (Iodine solutions are most effective between 20°C and 45°C).
  - d. 500 ppm Accelerated Hydrogen Peroxide.
2. A means to measure sanitizer concentration is required and should be recorded on a daily basis.

## Food Safety Plans and Sanitation Plans

1. Operators of mobile units must develop, maintain and follow written procedures (Food Safety Plans) to ensure that a health hazard does not occur in the operation of the unit. Refer to [Table 1](#).
2. Operators of mobile units must develop, maintain, and follow written procedures (Sanitation Plans) to ensure the safe and sanitary operation of the unit. Refer to [Table 1](#).
3. Food safety and sanitation plans must be present on-site during operation. (Note: Units that dispense foods only do not need a food safety plan or a sanitation plan)
4. If potentially hazardous foods are sold or stored on a mobile food premises unit, temperature records for hot and cold holding units should be maintained as part of the Food Safety Plan.
5. Sanitation Plans must include procedures for cleaning and sanitizing water tanks.

6. A revised food safety plan must be submitted if the daily distance travelled from the approved base of operation increases (e.g., mobile unit travels outside of regular operating area) or if the mobile unit does not return to the base of operation as specified in the food safety plan (e.g., mobile unit remains at one site for several days without returning to the base of operation). All the processes and procedures that have been approved to occur at the base of operation will need to be addressed.

## Food Handler Training and Hygiene

1. Operators of mobile food premises units must hold a valid certificate for the successful completion of the food handler training program known as FOODSAFE Level 1 or its equivalent as shown in [Table 1](#).
2. In the absence of the operator, at least one person present on the unit must have a valid FOODSAFE Level 1 certificate or its equivalent as shown in [Table 1](#).
3. A food handler, while engaged in food handling, shall be clean, wear only clean clothing, refrain from chewing or smoking tobacco and keep hair effectively under control.
4. A food handler must wash hands after every possibility of contamination, such as taking a break, using the washroom, sneezing, handling soiled articles and before resuming food service activities or food handling.
5. Food handlers must not work when ill. Any food handler who has been ill (e.g., nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, or diarrhea) must not return to work for at least 48 hours after symptoms have ended.

## Garbage

1. Every mobile food premises unit must have adequately sized garbage containers.
2. Garbage must be managed properly by keeping it in suitable containers and removing it often to prevent foul odours and conditions that attract insects or other pests. Wherever possible, the containers should be covered.
3. All waste must be disposed of in an approved manner.
4. Garbage containers are to be cleaned and sanitized on a regular basis.

## For More Information

Contact your local Health Authority:

- First Nations Health Authority - [www.fnha.ca](http://www.fnha.ca)
- Fraser Health – [www.fraserhealth.ca](http://www.fraserhealth.ca)
- Interior Health – [www.interiorhealth.ca](http://www.interiorhealth.ca)
- Island Health – [www.viha.ca](http://www.viha.ca)
- Northern Health – [www.northernhealth.ca](http://www.northernhealth.ca)

- Vancouver Coastal Health – [www.vch.ca](http://www.vch.ca)

## References

Food Premises Regulation (BC Reg. 210/99)

2004 Food Retail and Food Services Code

Table 1: Summary of Requirements Based on Type of Mobile Unit

Mobile Unit Type	Food Handling Examples	Permit or Approval	Number of Ware Washing Sinks	Handwashing Sink	Potable Water Tank Capacity (litres)	Food Safety Plan and Sanitation Plan	Food Handler Training
A	Units that dispense prepackaged foods or prepare and dispense unpackaged, nonpotentially hazardous foods, such as popcorn, cotton candy, mini-donuts, nachos OR units that dispense unpackaged hot and cold foods and beverages, such as pizza	Approval Only	2  (units that dispense pre-packaged foods do not require sinks)	Recommended	36 L  (units that dispense pre-packaged foods do not require water)	May be Required  (units that dispense prepackaged foods do not require a Food Safety Plan or Sanitation Plan)	Recommended
B	Units that prepare and dispense non-potentially hazardous foods and potentially hazardous foods such as hot dogs, smokies, precooked hamburgers, sandwiches, soups, chilis, and specialty coffee EXCLUDING cooking raw proteins (e.g., meat)	Permit	2	Required	36 L	Required	FOODSAFE or equivalent

C	Units that prepare and dispense any type of food and any level of food handling, including products with raw proteins, donairs, curries, stir-fry	Permit	3	Required	130 L	Required	FOODSAFE or equivalent
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