



## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT MOBILES

### What is a **mobile food service operation**?

A mobile food service operation is an operation that is operated from a movable vehicle, portable structure, or watercraft; routinely changes location; and it does not remain at any one location for more than forty consecutive days. If all of the conditions above are not met then the operation cannot be licensed as a mobile food service operation. This definition was developed to address food service operations of a truly mobile nature who “routinely,” meaning “regularly” or as “a matter of custom” changes location. Moving a mobile a few feet or pulling an operation around the block and returning to the same location does not comply with the intent of the law.

### 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 district in which the operator’s business headquarters are located. The application must be submitted prior to commencing operation in a new licensing year.

If a mobile food service operation’s business address is located outside Ohio, the health district in which the operation is first operated is to issue the mobile food service operator’s license.

The local health department may issue a temporary food service license to an out-of-state mobile or an unlicensed mobile if necessary. The temporary license will be valid for five days and only for that designated location.

You must have your current license with you at all times. If you do not, the health district that you are operating in may require you to get a temporary food service license.

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

Yes, plans must be submitted showing a layout of equipment and location of major equipment as well as a menu so a determination can be made that the operation has the appropriate equipment to adequately provide the items on the proposed menu. This floor plan and menu are needed for the back for the license when it is issued.

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

On the back of each license the health district must post the layout of the operation including the location and type of major equipment, and menu as well as any exemptions or any restrictions or conditions limiting the types of food that may be prepared or served by the license based on the equipment or facilities.

### **What information is required to be placed on the mobile?**

The name of the operation, the city of origin, the area code and telephone number must be conspicuously displayed on the exterior of the mobile unit.

The name and city of origin of the food service operation shall be displayed with individual lettering measuring at least three inches high and one inch wide.

### **What types of foods may be served?**

Any food may be served as long as all of the equipment on the floor plan and menu are consistent with the information on the back of the license. If a menu should change, please notify the licensing department.

All food must be prepared at the mobile food service operation and no preparation may be conducted at home with the exception of approved cottage foods. No home canned foods are permitted. All food shall be obtained from approved sources. For questions regarding types of approved sources contact your local health jurisdiction.

All foods shall be properly labeled and identified. Original packaging or labeling shall be maintained at the mobile food service. Bulk food containers of food if not in the original container and if not easily identified must be properly labeled by common name.

### **How are foods required to be protected (temperature requirements)?**

All potentially hazardous 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, display and transportation.

All potentially hazardous foods shall be cooked to the required cooking temperatures as listed on the temperature chart table.

**Please read the Recommended Temperatures for Food Handout [\(click here to get to handout\)](#)**

All potentially hazardous foods cooked in a microwave oven shall be cooked to 165°F or more. The foods shall be covered, rotated, or stirred midway through the cooking process to compensate for uneven distribution of heat. Covered to retain surface moisture, and allowed to stand covered for two minutes after cooking.

### **What are the requirements for reheating at a mobile food service operation?**

Foods that are to be reheated must be reheated to an internal temperature of at least 165°F (73.8°C) or higher and held at least fifteen seconds. This must be accomplished within two hours using equipment that is designed for this process. Unapproved steam tables, warmers, etc. are not permitted to be used for this purpose.

Potentially hazardous foods that are to be reheated in a microwave shall be covered and rotated or stirred midway during cooking or according to the label instructions. Foods must be allowed to stand for two minutes after reheating and then take the temperature which must be 165°F (73.8°C).

Any ready-to-eat foods taken from a commercially processed, hermetically sealed container, or from an intact package shall be heated to a temp of at least 135°F (57°C) if it is to be placed into hot holding.

### **What equipment is necessary to maintain product temperature?**

This will vary with the type of operation. Some operations will need both hot and cold holding equipment. If the operation is serving potentially hazardous foods, it must at least have approved commercial refrigeration equipment, or effectively insulated equipment to assure proper maintenance of temperatures. Each piece of refrigerated equipment must be provided with a numerically scaled thermometer (or recording thermometer), accurate to plus or minus 2°F (plus or minus 1.7°C) to measure the air temperature in the warmest part of the unit and located to be easily readable.

If potentially hazardous foods are to be held hot then adequate hot holding equipment will be required in addition to the items in the preceding paragraphs. The number of hot holding units will be determined by the size and scope of the operation. Each hot holding unit storing potentially hazardous foods shall be provided with a numerically scaled indicating thermometer or recording thermometer, accurate to plus or minus 2°F (1.1°C) located to measure the air at the coolest part of the equipment and located to be easily readable.

A metal thin stem-type, numerically scaled product thermometer, accurate to plus or minus 2°F (or plus or minus 1.1°C) shall be provided and used to assure proper cooking, holding, or refrigeration temperatures are being maintained and/or attained. The type and number of thermometers used shall be adequate for the type of food or operation. An end point sensor type thermometer shall be used for taking the temperature for thin foods.

### **How should frozen foods be thawed?**

Frozen foods may be thawed under refrigeration that maintains the food temperature at 41°F (5°C) or less, submerged under cold running water in a container so that flocculent material can overflow, in a microwave, or for immediate cooking.

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

All foods, contact items and equipment must be protected from potential contamination at all times. Including but not limited to: dust, insects, rodents, unclean equipment and utensils, unnecessary handling, coughs and sneezes, hair, overhead leakage or drippage from condensation. Foods shall be

stored at least 6 inches above the floor surface. Food or equipment that is stored outside of the mobile facility shall be covered and protected adequately from the environment.

Foods, raw and prepared, if removed from the original container must be stored in a clean, covered, approved container.

Prepared or ready-to-eat foods shall be stored above uncooked potentially hazardous foods. Uncooked potentially hazardous foods that require a lower cooking temperature shall be stored above foods requiring a higher cooking temperature to prevent potential cross contamination.

All equipment, surfaces, and utensils must be cleaned to sight and touch and sanitized.

Ice scoops may be stored with handles out of ice in ice intended only for human consumption.

Ice used to cool beverage lines and/or cold plates may not be used for human consumption.

If ice is used for cold holdings of foods, the ice must be adequately drained.

Raw fruits and vegetables shall be thoroughly washed with potable water before being cooked or served.

#### **How must food be handled in mobile operations?**

Gloves shall be used when handling all ready-to-eat foods. No bare hand contact of ready-to-eat food is allowed. Gloves shall be changed and hands washed when changing duties such as handling uncooked potentially hazardous foods and then handling ready-to-eat foods. Food shall be prepared with the least possible manual contact using suitable utensils.

Ice scoops or other suitable utensils must be used when dispensing ice.

#### **How are dispensing utensils to be stored?**

Dispensing utensils must be stored clean and dry; in the food with handles out of the food; in potable running water with sufficient velocity to agitate and float off loose particles into an overflow.

Malt collars and dispensing utensils used in preparing frozen desserts shall be stored in a potable running water dipper well or clean and dry.

Ice scoops may not be stored in ice machines unless the ice machine is designed for such storage.

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

All employees are to be healthy, have clean clothing, wear hair restraints, and practice safe food handling procedures and wash hands when needed. Finger jewelry and nail polish are prohibited.

### **What equipment/utensils can be used in a mobile?**

Contact the local health department for approval of equipment prior to licensing. In the event that a piece of equipment should break during the course of the year it may be replaced with the same make and model number. Notify the local health department if any equipment is added or altered prior to installation. All equipment/utensils must be maintained in good condition at all times. Utensils shall be constructed of food grade materials.

### **What types of sinks are required on mobiles?**

All mobiles handling exposed foods are required to have proper hand washing facilities, this would include hot water under pressure, soap and disposable hand towels. All hand sinks shall be separate from all other sinks in the mobile facility. Hand sanitizers may be used in combination with hand washing, after the hands are washed, but not as the sole means of hand cleansing.

Hand washing signage shall be posted at all hand washing stations notifying employees to wash hands.

A three-compartment sink is required on all mobiles built after May 1, 1983. Sinks shall be constructed of stainless steel materials or another material designed for food contact and approved by the local health department.

A three-compartment sink may not be required on a mobile unit if it must return to a commissary daily for cleaning or it has no utensils used to dispense food. Sufficient utensils (clean) must be available during all hours of operation, in the event a utensil is soiled or dropped on the ground/floor rendering it unfit to use to dispense food. (Noted on the back of the license).

If the unit was built before May 1, 1983 a two-compartment sink would be permitted providing an acceptable detergent sanitizer (i.e. iodine-based sanitizer) and test kit or test strips are available at all times.

### **How are sanitizers to be used?**

An approved sanitizer is required to be used and test strips are to be available at all times to monitor the sanitizer while in use.

If you are using chlorine or a quaternary base as a sanitizer in a three-compartment sink, the first compartment would be used for soap and water, the middle compartment would be used for a clear water rinse, and the third and last compartment would be used for the sanitizer. These are the approved concentrations:

Chlorine at 50 – 100 ppm  
Quat – ammonia at 200 ppm  
Iodine – 12.5 – 25 ppm

Iodine detergent/ sanitizers are used as follows; the amount of the detergent sanitizer as specified by the manufacturer is to be placed in the first compartment and then add the amount of water specified. (This will form suds to be used in washing the utensils). In the second and last compartment the required

amount usually one-half of the amount used in the first compartment is placed in the sink **after the required amount of water is added** to prevent the formation of suds.

If other types of detergent/sanitizers are used, follow the manufacturers' directions and make sure that they are designed so that a final rinse is not required, so that they can be used in a two-compartment sink.

When using wiping cloths, they are to be stored in a solution of approved sanitizer at the concentration recommended by the manufacturer.

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

**How often is the equipment in a mobile operation required to be cleaned?**

Equipment, utensils and food contact surfaces used to prepare potentially hazardous foods on a continuous basis, shall be washed, rinsed and sanitized at least once every four hours. If these items are not in continuous use they shall be cleaned and sanitized after use and as necessary.

**\*\*The cleaning and maintenance of heat treatment dispensing freezers will follow the requirements as specified in Section 3701-21-071 of the Ohio Administrative Code.**

Non-food contact surfaces of equipment shall be cleaned as often as is necessary to keep free of accumulation of dust, dirt, food particles, and other debris.

**How are cleaned and sanitized equipment to be stored?**

All cleaned and sanitized utensils shall be handled in a way to prevent contamination. Utensils must be handled by their handles only and food contact items (cups, bowls, plates, etc.) shall be handled without contact with inside surfaces or surfaces that contact the user's mouth.

Equipment and utensils must be stored at least 6 inches off the floor, air dried and stored in a self-draining position.

**How are single service utensils stored/dispensed on a mobile?**

Unless pre-wrapped all knives, forks and spoons shall be dispensed with a handle of the utensil to the employee or the consumer.

All cups, bowls, etc. must be stored in a manner that will prevent contamination during storage and/or dispensing.

**\*\*Reuse of single-service articles is prohibited.**

**What are the requirements with regard to water that apply to a mobile?**

All water used in a mobile must be from an approved potable water source. If a potable water holding tank is used, it must be filled with water from an approved source, i.e. city water supply or from a well

that has been tested and has a safe water test result within the past year. A copy of these results must be available within the mobile unit.

The food contact surfaces of grills, griddles, and similar cooking devices and the cavities and door seals of microwaves shall be cleaned at least once a day. The food contact surfaces of all cooking equipment shall be kept free of encrusted grease deposits and other accumulated soil.

Hot and cold running water under pressure must be provided to all fixtures while in operation. Bottled water may be used but it must be obtained from a source that complies with applicable laws and handled and stored so that it will not become contaminated. Bottled and packaged water must be dispensed from the original container.

All mobiles must be equipped with a back-flow device to prevent possible contamination of a public water supply if connected to the water supply with a food grade hose. The appropriate back flow device for a mobile unit that has water supplied, under constant pressure, by using a food-grade hose hooked to a potable water source is an ASSE 1012 or 1024.

**\*\*If a potable water holding tank is used it must be separate from the holding tank for sewage.**

#### **How is the sewage disposed of in mobiles?**

A holding tank or a portable sewage dolly must be available if a direct sewage connection is not provided. The dolly when used must be properly emptied in an acceptable sanitary manner at the facilities provided. If a hose is connected to a sewer or approved dump site it must be connected so there is no spillage of waste. **(This hose may only be used for sewage and under no circumstances can it be used for a fresh water supply.)** Sewage holding containers shall be covered.

#### **What are the requirements of plumbing in mobiles?**

**Mobiles are not covered by any plumbing code.**

All sink drains must be properly connected to the sewage holding tanks or portable dolly.

Ice bin and food preparation sink drains cannot be directly connected to the sewage holding tank to prevent possible contamination of ice or food in the event of a sewage back up. An air gap shall be established for each unit between the drain and holding tanks or dolly. Ice bins can drip onto the ground.

A mop sink is not required in a mobile.

#### **What facilities are required on mobiles to dispose of garbage/trash?**

Trash containers that are leak proof, durable, cleanable, insect and rodent proof and that have tight fitting lids are required in all mobiles. This also includes storage of containers outside of the mobile. Trash cans are to be covered at all times and dumped in approved dumpsters or other facility when full to prevent insect/rodent attractions. Overnight storage of garbage in mobiles is prohibited.

### **What are the requirements of floors, walls and ceilings in a mobile?**

All floors, walls and ceilings are to be constructed of a material that is easily cleanable and kept clean at all times. Contact your local Health Department for a list of approved surface materials.

If mats are used on the floors, they must be non-absorbent and grease resistant and kept clean. **Carpeting may not be used.**

Floors, walls and ceilings are to be maintained in good repair at all times.

### **What are the lighting requirements in a mobile?**

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 must be properly shielded or shatter-resistant bulbs used to protect against broken glass falling onto food.

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 on a mobile?**

All chemicals needed to operate the mobile must be stored in their original container and stored below or separately from all food productions and contact items. Only those chemicals needed for the operation of the mobile are permitted. Chemical containers must be labeled to identify their contents.

Personal medications, clothing etc. are to be stored as so not to contaminate food or food contact surfaces.

All pressurized tanks shall be chained or secured to a wall or fixed to equipment.

### **Can a mobile be used as sleeping or living quarters?**

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

A complete copy of the Ohio Uniform Food Safety Code may be downloaded from the following web site: <http://www.odh.ohio.gov/rules/final/3717-1.aspx>

**\*\*\*\*\* 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 utilized as all the requirements needed to operate a mobile food service operation. Chapter 3701-21 of the Ohio Administrative Code should be consulted to assure that all applicable criteria have been addressed.**

**For questions, contact us at 440-576-6010 x3 between 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. Monday thru Friday.**



### **1. What is a Mobile Retail Food Establishment?**

A Mobile Retail Food Establishment is defined in Chapter 3717 of the Ohio Revised Code as a retail food establishment that is operated from a movable vehicle or other portable structure, and that routinely changes location.

### **2. Is there a Limit to How Long a Mobile Retail Food Establishment May Operate from the Same Location?**

Yes. If the establishment operates at any one location for more than forty consecutive days it is no longer considered a mobile retail food establishment.

### **3. How do you Determine if a Mobile Unit is a Mobile Retail Food Establishment or a Mobile Food Service Operation?**

As with permanent retail food establishments and food service operations the determination is based upon the primary business of the facility, the type of foods being offered and the method of sale.

A mobile food service operation is a unit where food is prepared and/or served in individual portions. Served means a response made to an order for one or more individual portions of ready-to-eat food.

A mobile retail food establishment is a unit where food is processed, prepared, manufactured or otherwise held or handled for retail sale in bulk quantities.

### **4. What are Examples of Typical Mobile Retail Food Establishments?**

- A mobile unit selling fresh or frozen meat, poultry or fish.
- A mobile unit selling fresh eggs.
- A mobile unit making and / or selling fudge by the pound.

### **5. Where Does the Operator of a Mobile Retail Food Establishment Get Licensed?**

The operator of a Mobile Retail Food Establishment is licensed by the local health department where their business headquarters is located. The business headquarters is the business mailing address. The operator of a Mobile Retail Food Establishment that comes to Ohio from another state must obtain their license from the local health department where they first sell food from their unit.

## **6. How do I get a license?**

You will need to contact the local health department. They will help guide you through the licensing process. They will identify the type of information that they require to determine if your unit meets the necessary criteria to become licensed. A few of the basic items that they will need include: a drawing or sketch of the layout of your mobile unit, an equipment listing, and a listing of the food products you plan to sell.

## **7. Are there Limitations to What Foods I can Sell from my Mobile Retail Food Establishment?**

Yes. The foods that may be offered for sale are limited by the equipment and facilities provided on the mobile unit. The local health department will determine your equipment needs prior to issuing a license. They will sketch a diagram of your unit on the back of the license and identify the types of foods that you are approved to offer for sale.

## **8. Do I have to Obtain a Mobile Retail Food Establishment License from each Local Health Department that has Jurisdiction Over the Area where I set My Unit Up to Sell Food?**

No. The license you obtain from the local health department where your business headquarters is located will be given "full faith and credit" by all local health departments in Ohio.

## **9. What are Examples of Mobile Units that would be Exempt from a Mobile Retail Food Establishment License?**

- A mobile unit selling fresh fruits and fresh vegetables that are unprocessed.
- A mobile unit with alcoholic beverages and/or prepackaged beverages that are not potentially hazardous.
- A mobile unit with commercially pre-packaged non-potentially hazardous foods in displays up to 200 cubic feet.

## **10. Questions?**

Contact ODA Division of Food Safety  
1-800-282-1955 (toll-free only within Ohio) or 614-728-6250  
E-mail: [foodsafety@agri.ohio.gov](mailto:foodsafety@agri.ohio.gov)