



Division of Environmental Health

100 H Street - Suite 100 - Eureka, CA 95501

Phone: 707-445-6215 - Toll Free: 800-963-9241

Fax: 707-441-5699

envhealth@co.humboldt.ca.us

MOBILE FOOD FACILITY FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. WHAT IS A MOBILE FOOD FACILITY?

A Mobile Food Facility (MFF) is a vehicle used in conjunction with a commissary or other permanent food facility upon which food is sold or distributed directly to the consumer at retail. Mobile Food Facilities are not “stand alone” operations, but are primarily the point-of-service for food that has been stored and prepared at the commissary. All mobile food facilities must have a permit to operate issued by the Humboldt County Division of Environmental Health (DEH). The California Retail Food Code (CalCode) contains construction and operational requirements for MFFs. Local ordinances may restrict or regulate where MFFs may park and operate; permits may be required by some jurisdictions or locations.

2. ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF MOBILE FOOD FACILITIES?

Yes. Carts, food trucks and other vehicles where the operator stands outside the unit have different requirements from those where the operator stands inside the unit. Carts where the operator stands outside the vehicle may conduct only what CalCode defines as “Limited Food Preparation” (LFP; see FAQ #16). Anything beyond LFP must be done at the Commissary. Occupied mobile food facilities are permitted a broader range of food preparation inside the MFF. Occupied mobile food facilities require an Insignia of Approval from the California Department of Housing and Community Development, Division of Codes and Standards (HCD; see example on page 4). More information can be found at <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/building-standards/manufactured-modular-factory-built/manufactured-mobile-home-insignia.shtml> or by contacting the Division of Codes and Standards Northern Area Office at (800) 952-8356.

3. WHAT IS A COMMISSARY?

A Commissary is an approved, permanent food facility that functions as the base kitchen for a MFF. Food production that involves batch cookery, cooling cooked foods, and pre-packaging must be done in the commissary. Raw materials for food preparation and prepackaged items are stored at the commissary. The MFF must report to the commissary each operating day for cleaning and servicing, and to restock hot and cold potentially hazardous foods.

Food intended for a MFF may not be stored in a private home, nor may food be stored on or in the MFF during hours of non-operation. All food must be returned to and stored in the commissary at the end of each operating day.

Commissaries are usually - but not always - permitted food facilities, and are subject to approval on a case-by-case basis.

4. CAN I LEAVE MY MOBILE FOOD FACILITY AT MY OPERATING LOCATION?

DEH will consider the location(s), menu and plan of operations in determining how often MFFs must report to their commissary and/or move (See FAQ #17, “Plan of Operations”).

5. CAN I PARK MY FOOD TRUCK OR CART AT HOME?

CalCode requires that a mobile food facility be stored at a Commissary or other approved location where it is protected from contamination. In Humboldt County, DEH approves storage locations for MFFs on a case-by-case basis. Local planning and/or zoning ordinances may apply to commercial vehicles stored at private homes or on public streets.

6. I BOUGHT A MFF FROM SOMEONE WHO PREVIOUSLY OPERATED IT IN HUMBOLDT COUNTY. HOW CAN I GET THE CART OR TRUCK PERMITTED?

If the MFF was recently permitted in Humboldt, it is likely that it already has C&S Insignia (if required) and is equipped to comply with CalCode. DEH will assess the MFF once a permit application is submitted. Applicants may review the files containing previous records regarding a mobile food facility at the Division of Environmental Health office upon request.

7. I BOUGHT A MOBILE FOOD FACILITY FROM OUTSIDE OF HUMBOLDT COUNTY. HOW DO I GET IT PERMITTED HERE?

All MFFs must meet the requirements of CalCode. Additionally, if the unit is an occupied MFF, it must have an Insignia from C&S. DEH will assess the MFF for CalCode compliance once a permit application is submitted. Older units may not meet current regulatory standards, and may require upgrades prior to permitting.

8. I AM IN THE PROCESS OF BUILDING A MFF. DO I NEED TO SUBMIT PLANS?

Yes. Any new construction or remodel of these vehicles (carts, trucks, trailers, etc.) must be done according to plans that have been reviewed and approved by DEH. All plans must be reviewed and approved prior to construction. Final approval is granted after field verification that the project was completed according to the approved plans, and that the vehicle has an Insignia of Approval from the California Department of Housing and Community Development, Division of Codes and Standards. See DEH "Plan Check Guidelines for Mobile Food Facilities and Mobile Support Units" for information on plans and submittal.

9. WHAT IF I PLAN TO PURCHASE A NEW, MANUFACTURED MOBILE FOOD FACILITY?

Please consult DEH prior to ordering or purchasing. Plans for a manufactured MFF may need approval, and units must be built to "California standards." In most cases, manufacturers can supply materials needed for plan review. Some manufactured units may receive a C&S Insignia at the factory prior to shipping.

10. CAN I USE AN ICE CHEST INSTEAD OF A REFRIGERATOR TO STORE HOT DOGS AND OTHER FOODS?

No. Mechanical refrigeration is required for storage of any potentially hazardous foods (PHFs). Refrigeration must meet NSF Standard 7 or equivalent. Nonpotentially hazardous beverages such as canned or bottled sodas may be stored in an ice chest or other container.

11. DO I NEED A THREE-COMPARTMENT SINK ON MY MOBILE FOOD FACILITY?

This will depend on the operation and menu. Cart-type operations that use a limited number of utensils may maintain an adequate supply of clean replacement utensils on hand for daily operation, and all utensils are washed, rinsed, and sanitized in the commissary. Occupied MFFs, where extensive food prep occurs inside the vehicle, will nearly always need a three-compartment sink for warewashing. How and where you sanitize utensils should be included in your plan of operation.

12. WHEN IS A HANDWASH SINK NOT REQUIRED?

A handwash sink is not required if the MFF sells only prepackaged food in its original container, and/or dispenses non-potentially hazardous beverages from bulk dispensers. Otherwise, all MFFs need a hand sink with warm running water.

13. CAN I OPERATE A BARBEQUE NEXT TO MY MFF?

No. All cooking in a MFF operation is to be conducted inside the enclosed MFF. You may not cook on a barbeque next to your MFF.

14. DO I NEED FOOD HANDLER CARDS OR A MANAGER FOOD SAFETY CERTIFICATION TO OPERATE A FOOD TRUCK OR CART?

The training requirements for operators of MFFs depend on the type of food preparation at the unit:

- a. For MFF operations preparing potentially hazardous foods, at least one person is required to have a valid Manager Food Safety Certification; all remaining employees must have a valid Food Handler Card.
- b. For MFF operations offering only pre-packaged foods, all employees must have a valid Food Handler Card.

15. WHAT IS A MOBILE SUPPORT UNIT (MSU)?

An MSU is required when operating a non-motorized truck, trailer, or cart that operates at a single location and is not brought back to the off-site commissary on a daily basis. The MSU services the stationary trailer or cart and is required to return to the commissary daily. The MSU shall be capable of transporting potable fresh water and waste water tanks, supplies, and food to and from the unit it serves. MSUs must be approved by DEH, and may only service MFF operations that use Limited Food Preparation.

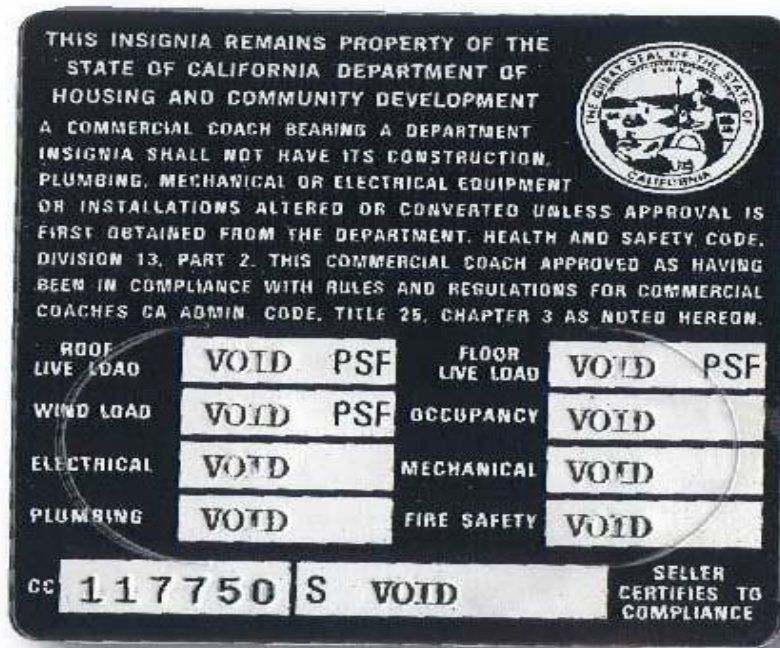
16. WHAT IS LIMITED FOOD PREPARATION?

"Limited food preparation" includes certain cooking processes (heating, frying, baking, roasting, popping, steaming or boiling of hot dogs); shaving of ice; blending; assembly of nonprepackaged food; dispensing and portioning of nonpotentially hazardous food; slicing and chopping of food on a heated cooking surface during the cooking process (e.g., carne asada, cheesesteak meat & onions); and preparing beverages that are for immediate service in response to an individual consumer order, that do not contain frozen milk products. "Limited food preparation" does not include any of the following: slicing and chopping (unless it is on the heated cooking surface); thawing; cooling of cooked, potentially hazardous food; grinding raw ingredients or potentially hazardous food; reheating of potentially hazardous foods for hot holding (except for steamed or boiled hot dogs and tamales in the original, inedible wrapper); hot holding of nonprepackaged, potentially hazardous food (except for roasting corn on the cob, steamed or boiled hot dogs, and tamales in the original, inedible wrapper); washing of foods; and cooking of potentially hazardous foods for later use.

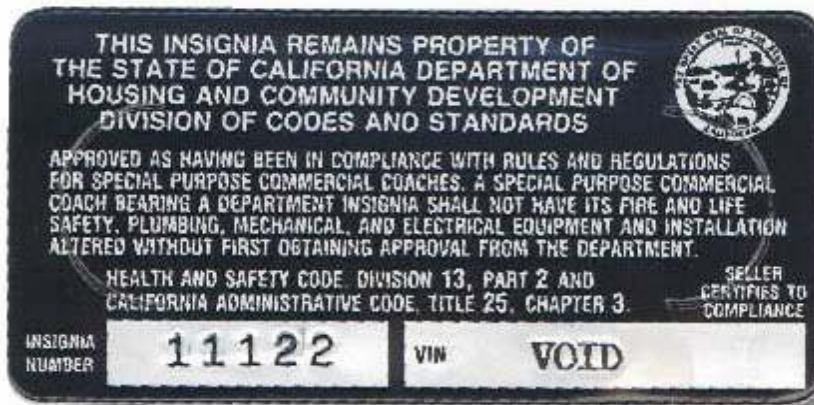
17. WHAT IS A PLAN OF OPERATIONS, AND WHY DO I NEED ONE?

Your plan of operations details all aspects of your Mobile Food Facility. The plan includes how and where you will move and store your unit, prepare food, clean and sanitize food contact surfaces, obtain and transport fresh water, and remove and dispose of waste water. DEH uses your plan of operations as the basis for approval of your mobile food operation. The more accurate detail you provide, the more likely your permit and plan will be approved. Remember: your plan of operations must comply with CalCode.

Prior to purchasing a new or used mobile food facility, the Division of Environmental Health recommends that you develop a PLAN OF OPERATIONS that takes into account the requirements of CalCode, including using the commissary for food prep and storage every day.



An example of a State Insignia of Approval or Department insignia issued to commercial modular units.



An example of a Department insignia of approval issued to special purpose commercial modular units.