



Operating Safely as a Caterer

All individuals working as part of a catering operation or host facility share the responsibility to prepare and serve food safely to prevent the spread of foodborne illness. This guide provides safe operating guidance for caterers to ensure a safe & approved food service function.

California Retail Food Code Definitions:

A Catering Operation means a food service that is conducted by a permanent food facility approved for food preparation where food is served, or limited food preparation conducted at a site other than its permitted location (off-site food service). Catering operations may occur by either two circumstances:

1. As part of a contracted off-site, private food service event.
2. Direct-to-consumer sales operating at a permitted Host Facility for no more than 4-hours in any 12-hour period, unless additional hours are otherwise approved by the County of San Diego's Department of Environmental Health & Quality (DEHQ).

A Host Facility is a permitted facility located in a brewery, winery, commercial building, or other facility that is regularly operated for purposes other than food service.

FOOD PREPARATION

All food preparation shall be conducted at the caterer's shared kitchen or commissary. Limited Food Preparation is allowed at offsite catered events, as defined in the California Retail Food Code Section 113818.

Maintain potentially hazardous food at 41°F or below or at 135°F or above.



EQUIPMENT

All equipment shall meet American National Standards Institute (ANSI) accredited certification program standards for sanitation, such as NSF, UL, ETL, etc.

All equipment must be returned to an approved kitchen to be washed, rinsed, and sanitized. Extra serving utensils or disposable serving utensils must be brought to the event in case the utensils become contaminated.

For direct-sales catering, mechanical refrigeration is required to hold all potentially hazardous food during operation.



HAND WASHING

All caterers handling unpackaged food at offsite events shall have access to an approved hand washing station supplied with warm water and fully stocked with soap and paper towels.

Direct-sales caterers are required to provide a self-contained hand wash station with pressurized warm water consisting of a water heater and potable/wastewater tanks.

PROTECTING FOOD FROM CONTAMINATION

Portable sneeze guards shall be used at buffet lines to protect the food from customer saliva, hair, etc.

Sneeze guards shall meet ANSI accredited certification program standards for sanitation.

Overhead protection and food compartments must be provided at off-site events.



SAFE HANDLING OF OPEN-AIR BBQ & OUTDOOR WOOD-BURNING OVENS



Use within the same premises and in conjunction with the catering operation.

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Separate from public access to prevent food contamination or injury to the public, such as with a barrier or rope.

Sanitary facilities (restrooms with handwashing sinks) shall be available for use within 200 feet

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Don't operate out of any motorized vehicle, or in areas that may constitute a fire hazard.

Prioritize food safety, especially during times of inclement weather or from other environmental contaminants.

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ALL CATERERS

- Operate with a valid DEHQ health permit.
- All food and equipment, prior to offsite food service, shall be stored and prepared at a permanent food facility.
- Home preparation and storage of food is not allowed.
- Conduct Limited Food Preparation at off-site events.
- Ensure basic food safety is maintained at all times.
- Utensils and equipment are cleaned, sanitized and stored properly.
- Have access to potable water or bring an adequate supply of potable water.
- Food handlers shall wash hands as frequently as necessary with warm water.
- Have approved toilet facilities within 200 feet.
- Proper disposal of garbage/refuse and wastewater during cleanup.
- Maintain a record of food service for 90 days after each event or day of service, including: the event menu, ingredients used in each food item sold or served, sources of all ingredients, and event organizer contact information.

PRIVATE EVENT CATERING

- Private events shall have a predetermined number of guests invited by a sponsor or organizer.
- Catering service must be arranged in advance of a private event between the caterer and the sponsor.
- Predetermined start-time and end-time for food service at the event.
- Predetermined quantity of food prepared, delivered, and served.
- Utilize a DEHQ-approved hand washing station that includes a 5-gallon insulated container with a continuous flow spigot and a wastewater catch basin.
- All potentially hazardous foods held at/below 41°F for cold-holding or at/above 135°F for hot-holding. Time as a Public Health Control is allowed if approved on the standard operating procedures.
- All potentially hazardous foods not consumed by guests must be disposed at the agreed service end time.



DIRECT-SALES CATERING

- Must operate at a catering host facility permitted by DEHQ.
- Must sell to only the patrons of the host facility.
- All potentially hazardous foods held at/below 41°F for cold-holding or at/above 135°F for hot-holding.
- Utilize a self-contained NSF-listed hand washing station with pressurized warm water consisting of a water heater and potable / wastewater tanks.
- Must use portable commercial-grade mechanical refrigeration at the food service site. Ice blocks, ice chests, or coolers are prohibited.
- All potentially hazardous foods not cold-held at/below 41°F during the entire time at the host facility shall be discarded when food service ends for that day.

