



MOBILE FOOD FACILITY OPERATIONS



Frequently Asked Questions

The Food and Housing Division of the Department of Environmental Health is responsible for permitting and inspecting all retail food facilities in the County of San Diego, including Mobile Food Facilities (MFF) and Occupied Mobile Food Facilities (OMMF). The following list of commonly asked questions provides an overview of the requirements to operate these units, including useful information for construction of new units, modification of existing ones and changes of ownership.

1. *I bought a cart/food truck from someone who previously operated it in San Diego. How can I get the cart or truck permitted?*

Provided that the Mobile Food Facility (MFF) or Occupied Mobile Food Facility (OMFF) previously operated under a valid permit from the Food and Housing Division (FHD), a consultation either in the field or at FHD's offices will help determine if it meets all applicable California Retail Food Code requirements; it will also determine the type of permit it needs to operate. If the MFF or OMFF was not previously operated under a valid Health Permit, plan review is needed. Please contact the local zoning department for the city you intend to operate in for that city's regulations pertaining to MFFs.

2. *I am in the process of building a MFF/OMFF. Do I need to submit plans?*

Yes. Any new construction or remodel of these carts or trucks must be done according to plans that have been reviewed and approved by FHD's Plan Check unit. 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.

3. *What is required with the plan submission?*

Applicants must submit three sets of identical plans, and written operating procedures. Letters of commissary and toilet use agreements, as well as their proposed location for operation are required for issuance of the operating permit and final approval to operate. Please refer to the MFF Construction Guide for plan submission requirements.

4. *Can I use an ice chest instead of a refrigerator to store my hot dogs and other foods?*

No, an ice chest does not maintain potentially hazardous foods (PHFs) such as hot dogs and dairy products sufficiently cold to keep them safe. Mechanical refrigeration is required for storage of any potentially hazardous foods (PHFs). Refrigeration shall meet National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) Standard 7 or equivalent.

5. *Can I park my food truck or cart at home?*

You cannot park food trucks at a private residence. All mobile food units must be stored at an approved Commissary.



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6. ***Can I scoop ice cream from a pushcart?***

Pushcarts (MFF) are only allowed to do “Limited Food Preparation” (see definition in the Mobile Food Construction Guide available at <http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/deh/food/foodplancheck.html>) and they cannot portion potentially hazardous foods (PHFs) such as ice cream or any dairy-based foods. Dispensing of non-potentially hazardous foods such as ice based products (e.g. snow cones) may be considered during the plan review process.

7. ***Do I need a three-compartment sink if I am selling coffee and smoothies?***

There are two warewashing options for an operator of an unenclosed unit that is preparing beverages containing PHFs such as dairy products (non-frozen) that will be served immediately to a customer:

- a. Provide a commercial three-compartment sink with dual integral drain boards that have at least the size of one sink compartment. The three-compartment sink is required to wash, rinse and sanitize utensils and blender pitchers. Its compartments shall be large enough to fully immerse the largest utensil used and have either of the following dimensions in inches (“): 12” wide, 12” long and 10” deep, **or** 10” wide by 14” long and 10” deep.
- b. A two compartment sink may be used if the number of utensils is limited and a batch washing procedure is reviewed and approved by this department. A two-compartment sink shall not be used where cleaning and sanitizing solutions are used for a continuous or intermittent flow of utensils in an ongoing warewashing process.

8. ***When is a three-compartment sink not required?***

A three-compartment sink is not required when the truck or cart only sells 100% pre-packaged foods, brewed coffee or coffee dispensed from air pots, boiled or steamed hot dogs, and tamales in inedible wrappers. An adequate supply of spare utensils for serving and dispensing shall be on hand.

9. ***What is a Mobile Support Unit (MSU)?***

An MSU is required when operating a non motorized truck or cart is operating at a single location and is not brought back to the offsite Commissary on a daily basis. The support unit services the stationary truck or cart and is required to return to the Commissary **daily**. The support unit shall be capable of transporting potable fresh water and waste water tanks, supplies and food to and from the unit it serves.

10. ***What is a Commissary? Do I have to go back to the Commissary every day?***

A commissary is an approved permitted Retail Food Facility that services and supplies carts, trucks (occupied or not), mobile support units or vending machines. Any type of mobile food facility is to operate in conjunction with an approved Commissary. All mobile food units shall return to the commissary **daily**. Refer to FAQ #9 for conditions on operating a stationary unit in coordination with a mobile support unit.

11. ***Can I operate a barbeque next to my MFF?***

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.



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12. ***Where can I find approved Commissaries in San Diego County?***

You may contact the Food and Housing Division of the Department of Environmental Health at 858-505-6900 to obtain a list of approved Commissaries operating in the County of San Diego.

13. ***I have an occupied food truck (OMFF) and want to get it permitted in San Diego. What types of requirements or certifications are required by the Health Department?***

- If the OMFF has previously been permitted in San Diego County, please refer to question #1.
- If the OMFF is brand new, remodeled or never operated in San Diego County before, please refer to question #2.
- All OMFFs equipped with 110-volt electrical connections, plumbing or mechanical exhaust hoods with cooking equipment require a certification insignia by the California Department of Housing Community Development (HCD) for a “Special Purpose Commercial Modular” vehicle. You may contact [HCD](#) for further information or replacement insignias at (951) 782-4420. You can also visit the manufactured housing program web page at www.hcd.ca.gov/codes/mhp and download the insignia replacement form at <http://www.hcd.ca.gov/codes/mhp/hcd416.pdf>.

14. ***What is an auxiliary conveyance?***

An auxiliary conveyance can be used for non motorized MFFs and Single Operating Site (SOSMFFs) only. The auxiliary unit is part of the permitted cart and houses equipment that cannot fit on the main MFF unit. Generally this includes the three compartment sink and a hand sink, along with the associated hot water heater, water and waste water tanks. An auxiliary conveyance may also contain backup storage items.

15. ***How many auxiliary conveyances can I have?***

MFFs usually have one auxiliary conveyance to house either the 3-compartment sink and/or hand sink. Auxiliary conveyances are not used for preparing, processing or selling food items.

16. ***Can I use a soft service yogurt machine in my food truck or cart?***

Soft serve yogurt machines may only be operated in an enclosed truck that meets the requirements for processing and dispensing potentially hazardous foods. Contact the State of California Dairy Board at 916-654-0466 regarding permitting requirements for a soft service machine.

17. ***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 Mobile Food Facilities (MFF) depend on the type of food being handled at the unit:

- a. For MFF operations handling open 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 not handling open potentially hazardous foods, all employees must have a valid Food Handler Card.