

# Requirements for Mobile Food Units and Push Carts

Information on starting a mobile food unit or push cart operation

Catawba County



Environmental Health Department



# Requirements for Mobile Food Units and Push Carts

This brochure is intended as a general guide for operators who wish to vend food from a mobile food unit or pushcart to begin to become familiar with the standards for construction and operation of these units. Before beginning construction or operation of such units, the local health department should be contacted for a thorough explanation and understanding of the rules and requirements.

The *Rules Governing the Sanitation of Restaurants and Other Foodhandling Establishments, 15A NCAC 18A, section 2600*, sets forth requirements for the operation of foodhandling establishments, and contains specific requirements for operation of mobile food units and push carts, in addition to the rules governing foodhandling generally. This ruleset is available at <http://www.deh.enr.state.nc.us/ehs/rules/t15a-18a.26.pdf> or at the Environmental Health Department for a nominal fee.

In section .2601, a **mobile food unit** is defined as “a vehicle mounted food service establishment designed to be readily moved”. A **push cart** is defined as “a mobile piece of equipment or vehicle which serves hot dogs or foods which have been prepared, pre-portioned, and individually pre-wrapped at a restaurant or commissary.”

These permitted units can operate year-round. They are different from **temporary food service establishments**, which are defined as “those food and drink establishments which operate for a period of 15 days in connection with a fair, carnival, circus, public exhibition, or other similar gathering”, although a mobile food unit or push cart can serve at such events without the issuance of a separate permit.

## Overview of general requirements for mobile food units and push carts

- The first and most important requirement for any mobile food unit or push cart is that it **must be operated in conjunction with a permitted restaurant or commissary, and shall report at least daily to that restaurant or commissary for supplies, cleaning and servicing**. The county in which the restaurant or commissary is located will issue the permit for the mobile food unit or push cart.
- The unit must be submitted for inspection to the Environmental Health Department to determine compliance with the rules.
- An agreement must be signed by the restaurant or commissary operator and the mobile food unit or push cart operator and properly notarized. This agreement will give access to the restaurant adequate to meet all requirements in the rules. Facilities in compliance with section .2600 must be provided at the restaurant or commissary for storage of all supplies. All solid waste and liquid waste must be properly disposed of at this establishment. A meeting among the restaurant owner or operator, the mobile food unit operator, and a representative from the Environmental Health Department will be arranged during which the responsibilities of each party will be explained. The agreement form will be provided by the Environmental Health representative to the parties at this meeting.
- The operator must provide to the local health department issuing the permit a list of all counties and locations where the unit will operate, and to the local health departments in all counties of operation a list of those locations within that county where the unit will operate.
- The permit for the unit shall be posted so that it is visible to the public.

## Some important specific requirements for mobile food units

- The mobile food unit shall be constructed and arranged so that food, drink, utensils and equipment will not be exposed to insects, dust and other contamination. Protection against flies shall be provided by screening or effective use of fans. Food or equipment exposed to the public or to dust or insects, shall be protected by glass or otherwise, on the front, top and ends, and exposed only as much as may be necessary to permit the handling and serving of food.

- All equipment used on the mobile food unit shall be of commercial manufacture and approved by a third party certifier, such as NSF.
- The mobile food unit must have a potable water system under pressure. Water heating facilities must be provided. The system must provide hot and cold water sufficient for all preparation, handwashing and cleaning requirements for a full day of operation. The water inlet must be protected from contamination and be a different size from the sewage outlet.
- A permanently installed sewage holding tank must be provided, and shall be at least 15% larger than the potable water tank. The outlet must be lower than the water inlet connection.
- A handwash sink with hot and cold water, combination faucet, and soap and towels must be provided.
- At least a single compartment sink of sufficient size to submerge and wash the cooking utensils used, and must have drainboards which are made as an integral part of the sink. See page 4 for an example of a sink which meets this requirement.
- A servicing area shall be provided at the restaurant. Potable water connections shall be installed so as to protect the water and equipment from contamination. All sewage shall be discharged to an approved sewage disposal system.

### **Some important specific requirements for push carts**

- **Only hot dogs** shall be prepared, handled or served from a pushcart. Foods which have been prepared, pre-portioned and individually wrapped in a restaurant or commissary may be sold from a pushcart, but they must be delivered to the customer unopened and not be opened or otherwise handled by the operator.
- All equipment used on the mobile food unit shall be of commercial manufacture and approved by a third party certifier, such as NSF.
- Food and utensils on the cart exposed to the public or dust or other contamination shall be protected by glass or otherwise, on the front, top and ends, and exposed only as much as may be necessary to permit the handling and serving of hot dogs.
- If pre-portioned, wrapped foods are sold, the operator shall provide documentation to the Department which demonstrates the ability of the equipment to hold proper temperatures for these items. Any food of this nature shall be labeled with the name of the restaurant or commissary at which it was prepared, the name of the food item and the time and date of expiration. Food that has exceeded this period shall be discarded.
- Pushcarts shall not allow customer self service nor shall they provide seating.

When all the requirements in section .2600 have been met, a permit to operate can be issued to the operator. The unit will be inspected by the Environmental Health Division in each county of operation at least quarterly. The operator must keep the EHD updated regarding dates and locations of operation so that inspections may be made. The permit for any unit not inspected during any quarter will be placed on inactive status. If a unit does not comply with the provisions of the rules, such as returning to the permitted restaurant or commissary on each day of operation, the permit for the unit may be suspended.

**Questions:** Please contact the Catawba County Environmental Health Department office at (828) 465-8270 between the hours of 8:00am and 5:00pm Monday through Friday if you have questions on these requirements.

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An example of a sink which complies with the requirement in 15A NCAC 18A, section .2640(e), Specific Requirements for Mobile Food Units which requires:

(e) At least an approved single-compartment sink shall be provided. This sink shall be of sufficient size to submerge, wash, and rinse cooking utensils and shall have splashback protection and drainboards that are an integral part of, and continuous with, the sink. These drainboards shall be of sufficient size to accommodate the drying of washed utensils.



Mobile Food Unit sketch:

Draw the mobile food unit, identifying and describing all equipment, including **handwash facilities, equipment washing facilities**, cooking equipment, refrigeration, worktables, storage, hot and cold holding units, water source and storage. Describe the floor, wall and ceiling surfaces of the mobile food unit.

