

Permanent Outdoor Food Establishments

Requirements for outdoor food establishments are dependent on the individual operation – including the menu, food preparation, volume of foods to be served, and the hours of operation. For example, a cart proposing to serve coffee drinks in the morning will have very different requirements than one serving Italian sausage and pizza all day. This document contains information on open air food carts and enclosed food trailers, as well as basic items that any food operation must have.

If you have any questions about outdoor food service, please contact our office at 734-222-3800. Note that any changes to an approved menu, equipment, or procedures must be submitted to and approved by the Washtenaw County Environmental Health Division before the proposed changes can be put into practice.

All operations must have:

- Hand washing sink with hot and cold running water, soap and paper towels on a dispenser
- Hot holding (as needed), such as a steam table
- Cold holding (as needed), such as mechanical refrigeration that is NSF approved or equivalent
- Storage for plates, cups, utensils, etc for serving food
- Three compartment sink for dish washing (if required)
- Storage for clean dispensing utensils, in use dispensing utensils, gloves, etc.
- Storage for the day's worth of food and supplies
- Trash disposal containers (inside and out)
- Storage for sanitizer solution and paper towels
- Hot water heater, or other mechanism to heat water for hand washing
- Fire extinguisher – check with the local fire department on requirements

General considerations:

- Properly located hand sinks: There should be some physical separation between the hand sink and the three compartment sink (if applicable).
- Properly sized three compartment sinks: If applicable, your sinks must be large enough to submerge all items that require cleaning, including pots, pans, utensils, etc. Drainboard space must be located on each side of the three compartment sink.
- Properly sized water storage tanks: Water capacity must be adequate to supply water for hand washing, to fill the three compartment sinks, provide water to the steam table, use for food preparation, etc.
- Properly sized waste water storage tanks: Waste water capacity is required to be 15% larger than your water storage tanks (including the capacity of your hot water heater).
- Hot water heater: There needs to be a mechanism to provide hot water to your cart or trailer.
- Overall construction: The cart or trailer must meet NSF standards or the equivalent. It must be made of smooth, easily cleanable surfaces. Look for good construction, durable hinges and doors, finished edges & seams, etc.
- Equipment must be NSF approved or equivalent.
- Ventilation: If your enclosed trailer has cooking equipment, you must have it vented using mechanical ventilation of commercial design. If you operate during the winter months, make-up air may also be required.
- Mechanical refrigeration: If you have foods you need to hold cold, you will likely need commercial refrigeration and you may also need a prep-top style refrigerator to assemble foods.
- Ice: Ice is only allowed for holding beverages cold. Ice is not to be used as a method to hold foods cold.
- Service windows: Must be screened and be designed to be self-closing, easily closable, or have air curtains installed on them.
- Your approval to operate is based on your submitted menu and equipment.

Open Air Food Cart

Open Air Carts, or “hot dog carts” are typically seasonal in terms of their service period, do not have a way to protect foods from outdoor contaminants, such as insects, do not typically have refrigeration and are usually very limited in their menu to 1 or 2 food items. Most carts of this style serve hot dogs as their only menu item.

Approved for:

- Dispensing of a limited menu of commissary prepared foods in their current form (i.e. already assembled, already hot or cold)
- Dispensing beverages, such as soft drinks, coffee or tea
- Dispensing pre-packaged foods, such as chips, beverages
- Heating and holding hot dogs hot

Not approved for:

- Assembling foods such as sandwiches, tacos, salads, etc
- Reheating foods
- Cooking raw meats
- Cutting, preparing foods
- Deep frying
- Cooling
- Extensive/complex menu

Enclosed Food Trailer

Enclosed Food Trailers are typically year-round in their service period, have more protection from insects, have a wider variety of equipment components and may have a slightly larger menu of 3-4 food items.

Approved for*:

- Dispensing a limited menu of commissary
- Prepared foods in their current form (i.e. already assembled, already hot or cold)
- Dispensing beverages, such as coffee, soft drinks or tea
- Dispensing packaged foods, such as chips, beverages
- Heating and holding hot dogs hot
- Cooking raw meats*
- Assembling foods such as sandwiches, tacos, salads, etc*
- Deep frying*
- Reheating foods*

Not approved for:

- Cooling
- Extensive/complex menus
- Extensive preparation
- Extensive dish and ware washing

*With proper equipment, space and menu approval