

# Mobile And Portable Units

## Guidance For Success In Washoe County



**WASHOE COUNTY  
HEALTH DISTRICT**  
ENHANCING QUALITY OF LIFE



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Environmental Health Services  
Washoe County Health District  
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# Start-Up Checklist for Operators

Use this checklist to track your progress toward opening your mobile food unit.

- Review local regulations to be informed of laws applicable to mobile units
  - [WCHD Food Regulations](#)
    - \* Mobile/portable unit plan review and specific operations in Chapter 190
  - Local Municipal Code
    - \* [Reno Administrative Code: Section 4.05.005](#)
    - \* [Sparks Code of Ordinances: Section 20.03.029](#)
  
- Register with your jurisdiction's Business License
  - \* [Washoe County Business License](#) - if operating in unincorporated Washoe County
  - \* [City of Reno Business License](#)
  - \* [City of Sparks Business License](#)
  
- Verify your jurisdiction's Fire Department requirements and inspection process
  - \* [Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District](#)
  - \* [City of Reno Fire Department](#)
  - \* [City of Sparks Fire Department](#)
  
- Prepare your unit
  - Establish a servicing area
  - Find a location for parking and maintenance
  - Obtain or renovate unit that meets code requirements in local regulations
  
- Apply for Health Permit with the following forms
  - [Application for Permit to Operate](#)
  - [Servicing Area Agreement](#)
  - [Mobile/Portable Unit and Servicing Area Operational Review](#) with:
    - Plot Plan
    - Pictures of unit
  
- Receive Opening Inspection and Risk Level Assessment from WCHD
  
- Obtain a [Food Protection Manager's Certification\(s\)](#) based on Risk Level
  
- Receive 1st routine operational inspection within 90 days of opening



# Introduction

It is unlawful for any person to operate a food establishment within the Washoe County unless that person possesses a valid permit to operate. Any person desiring to operate a food establishment shall submit a written application for a permit on forms provided by the Health Authority. Permit application forms can be obtained in person at the Washoe County Health District (WCHD) Environmental Health Services located at 1001 East Ninth Street, Building B, Reno, NV or online. These guidelines are intended to provide an overview of the requirements associated with the permitting of a Mobile/Portable Food Unit.

Please be advised that a permit to operate issued by the WCHD will not be the only permit/license required to operate within Washoe County. A list of other agencies you should contact is attached to this guidance.

Contact the [WCHD Food Safety Team](mailto:foodsafety@washoecounty.us) with questions or for more information: [foodsafety@washoecounty.us](mailto:foodsafety@washoecounty.us).

# Definitions

## Mobile Unit

Means any motorized vehicle operating from an approved servicing area in which food, beverages, frozen desserts, or dairy products and mixes are prepared, processed, or converted for human consumption and which is used to sell and dispense food and beverages to customers. The term includes full service “hot” trucks and limited service “ice cream” trucks.

## Portable Unit for Service of Food

Means a food establishment on wheels, easily conveyed from a servicing area to one or more approved locations where food is served, and clearly identified in the permit application (i.e., coffee carts, hot dog carts, trailer units, etc.).

## Servicing Area

Means a location approved by the Health Authority and used by operators of mobile units and portable units for service of food for such things as food and supply storage, warewashing, food preparation, vehicle and equipment cleaning and maintenance, discharging liquid or solid wastes, and refilling water tanks and ice bins.



# Getting Started

## Review WCHD Food Establishment Regulations

Mobile and portable units (hereinafter referred to as mobile units) must abide by all [WCHD Food Establishment Regulations](#). Regulations for mobile unit plan review and specific operations are included in Chapter 190. WCHD Food Establishment Regulations are available online.

## Review WCHD Food Safety Resource Library

The [Food Safety Resource Library](#) is an online collection of handouts, posters, logs, sample standard operating procedures (SOPs), and more to help you create a culture of food safety in your facility from the start. Whether you are training new employees or looking for new ways to educate current staff, the Resource Library has the right materials to ensure food safety stays fundamental to your operations.



Examples of handouts from the Food Safety Resource Library

## Apply for a Health Permit

All applications and forms can be found [online](#). Applicants must submit the following items to the Health Authority for review and approval prior to operating:

- [Application for Permit to Operate](#)
- Application Fee
- [Mobile/Portable Unit and Servicing Area Operation Review](#)
- Design Plans for Mobile Unit layout
- [Servicing Area Agreement](#)
- Mobile Units using Out of Jurisdiction Servicing Areas must provide additional documentation outlined in the WCHD Food Regulations ([190.085 Section E](#))



# Mobile Unit Requirements

The intended menu, construction of the unit, and available equipment will determine the capacity in which your mobile unit will be permitted to operate. This list does not include all construction/equipment requirements and the WCHD Food Establishment Regulations should be reviewed for additional detail.

The following are basic requirements that will apply to most mobile units:

- Hot and cold running water under pressure from an approved source
- Dedicated handwashing sink (may not apply to sale of prepackaged items only)
- Potable water tank
- Waste water tank (15% larger capacity than potable water tank)
- Durable and cleanable floor, walls, ceiling, and food preparation surfaces
- Mechanical ventilation where cooking is conducted
- Mechanical refrigeration
- Name of business permanently affixed on two sides of the unit

# Servicing Area Requirements

## Services Provided

All mobile units are required to work out of a single, approved servicing area. There are no exceptions to this requirement. Servicing areas are intended to support the mobile unit with vital services that the unit itself cannot provide. These services include but are not limited to:

- Obtaining potable water
- Disposal of waste water
- Disposal of garbage
- Grease interceptor
- Storage of food and other items
- Backup refrigeration
- Food preparation
- Utensil cleaning and dishwashing

Most servicing areas are located at existing permitted food establishments (i.e. restaurants, commercial kitchens, etc.); however, any facility that meets requirements may be considered as an acceptable location. Note that the servicing area is treated as a permitted food establishment and will be subject to inspection by WCHD personnel.

## Separation of Businesses

Operators at servicing areas that are contracted to support mobile units must demonstrate they have the capacity to maintain a separation of businesses. For



# Servicing Area Requirements (continued)

example, servicing areas must have space set aside for the mobile unit operator in storage areas (both dry and refrigerated). All food and equipment belonging to the mobile unit operator must be properly labeled with the name of the mobile unit.

It is possible for servicing areas to have an agreement with multiple mobile units if the servicing area operator demonstrates there is adequate space and capacity to keep all businesses separate. In this case, the servicing area operator must maintain an updated list for all mobile units at the facility and the services they have agreed to provide each mobile unit.

## Record Keeping

Every year, mobile unit operators must [provide a schedule](#) to the WCHD of days and times of food preparation at their servicing area. The schedule will be used to coordinate inspections to observe the food handling practices of your operations.

While it is not required to keep a [log of visitations](#) to your servicing area, it is highly encouraged. Mobile units must return to their servicing area at least once daily while operating for essential services and logs can be used to document this activity. Copies of blank logs may be found on our online [Resource Library](#).

## Changing Your Servicing Area

Servicing areas are a vital component to the operation of a mobile food unit. Mobile food units are prohibited from operating without a current servicing area. If you wish to change your servicing area you must immediately notify the WCHD and cease operations until a new [Servicing Area Agreement](#) has been submitted, applicable fees have been paid, and an inspection has been conducted.

The WCHD does not maintain a list of available servicing area locations.



# Opening Inspection

Once all application forms have been submitted and applicable fees have been paid, you will be contacted by a WCHD inspector to schedule an opening inspection. This inspection will occur at the servicing area and include a review of both the mobile unit and servicing area. The servicing area owner or person in charge, as well as the mobile operator, must be present for the opening inspection.

## The Process

The WCHD inspector will review paperwork and conduct a physical inspection of the mobile unit and the food servicing area to ensure both are in compliance with the WCHD Food Establishment Regulations. Items that should be ready for an opening inspection include, but are not limited to:

- All equipment must be NSF rated for sanitation or equivalent
- All equipment must be operational, turned on, and in good repair
- Thermometers must be inserted in all hot and cold units
- Hot and cold running water must be operational
- All handsinks must be stocked with soap and paper towels
- All surfaces must be smooth, durable, and easily cleanable
- The servicing area must demonstrate capacity to support mobile unit

## Risk Levels

The WCHD inspector will also review your proposed menu and ask about the food processes you intend to conduct both on your mobile unit and at your servicing area. A Risk Level will be assigned based on the food processes conducted for your operations, which will determine the frequency of your routine inspections. See [Section 010.725](#) of the WCHD Food Establishment Regulations for more information on Risk Levels.

## Approval Process

If your mobile unit is approved at the opening inspection, your business may begin to operate at the conclusion of your inspection. A permit sticker and your formal Health Permit to Operate will be issued by the Health Authority and sent via mail. Once received, the sticker must be clearly posted on the outside of the mobile unit.



# Special Events

The operation of mobile units at [special events](#) has been increasingly noted by the WCHD. It is a requirement that mobile unit operators notify the WCHD when operating at a special event. **All mobile food units are required to return to their designated servicing area daily to perform the services noted above.** If a mobile unit cannot return to their servicing area daily, as is commonly the case during a special event, it may be necessary to obtain a temporary food permit to operate during a multiple day special event. Temporary food permitting may be unnecessary if a mobile food unit operator can demonstrate that the mobile food unit can be operated safely and completely self-sustainable for multiple days, however, prior arrangements must be made in advance with WCHD personnel. Please note that you may be subject to additional permit and late fees if arrangements are not made in advance.

## WCHD Resource Links

### Food Safety Homepage

<https://www.washoecounty.us/health/programs-and-services/environmental-health/food-protection-services/index.php>

### Mobile and Portable Unit Page

<https://www.washoecounty.us/health/programs-and-services/environmental-health/food-protection-services/Mobile%20and%20Portable%20Units.php>

### Food Establishment Regulations

[https://www.washoecounty.us/health/files/ehs/regulations/Food\\_Regs\\_2016-09-09.pdf](https://www.washoecounty.us/health/files/ehs/regulations/Food_Regs_2016-09-09.pdf)

### Food Safety Resource Library

<https://www.washoecounty.us/health/programs-and-services/environmental-health/food-protection-services/Resource-Library.php>

### Applications and Forms

<https://www.washoecounty.us/health/resources/health-forms/index.php>

### Special Events Page

<https://www.washoecounty.us/health/programs-and-services/environmental-health/food-protection-services/special-events.php>



# Outside Agency Information

## Washoe County Business License

[https://www.washoecounty.us/csd/planning\\_and\\_development/business\\_license/index.php](https://www.washoecounty.us/csd/planning_and_development/business_license/index.php)

## Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District

<https://tmfpd.us/>

## Reno Business License

<https://www.reno.gov/government/departments/community-development/business-license-division>

## Reno Environmental Control

<https://www.reno.gov/government/departments/public-works/wastewater-infrastructure-plants-environmental-services/environmental-control>

## Reno Administrative Code

[https://library.municode.com/nv/reno/codes/administrative\\_code?nodeId=PT2READCO\\_TIT-4BULICO\\_CH4.05MOVEUN](https://library.municode.com/nv/reno/codes/administrative_code?nodeId=PT2READCO_TIT-4BULICO_CH4.05MOVEUN)

## Reno Fire Department

<https://www.reno.gov/government/departments/fire-department>

## Sparks Business License

<https://cityofsparks.us/departments/business-license-dept/>

## Sparks Environmental Control

<https://cityofsparks.us/departments/ecs/>

## Sparks Code of Ordinances

[https://library.municode.com/nv/sparks/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=TIT20ZOCO\\_CH20.03USST\\_S20.03.029MOVE](https://library.municode.com/nv/sparks/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=TIT20ZOCO_CH20.03USST_S20.03.029MOVE)

## Sparks Fire Department

<https://cityofsparks.us/resources/departments/fire-department/>



# Frequently Asked Questions

**Do I need plumbed handsink?** Yes. All mobile units must have at least one designated handsink that is properly stocked with soap, papertowels, and has hot & cold running water.

**How big does my potable water tank need to be?** Units that have only one handsink may only need a 5-gallon potable water tank with a wastewater tank at least 15% larger than the potable water tank. For instance, if the unit is a lower risk category with minimal food handling procedures, one handsink may be sufficient. For other higher risk food handling procedures, and/or the unit has a 3-compartment sink & a handsink, the potable water tank must be a minimum of 40 gallons with a wastewater tank at least 15% larger than the potable tank. The size of the potable and wastewater tanks will depend on the business.

**Can I set up a table with sodas, chips, condiments outside of mobile unit?** No. The mobile unit must be self-contained. That is, everything must fit in/on the unit.

**Can I use an ice chest to keep my foods cold on the unit?** Yes and No. All TCS food must be stored in a mechanical refrigeration unit that maintains food temperatures at 41F or below. Sodas, water etc. may be stored in an ice chest on the unit.

**Can I use a temporary handsink like the ones I see used at a temporary food event?** No. The mobile unit must be self-contained. All equipment used for washing hands, prepping, cooking, cold holding or hot holding food must be permanently plumbed on the unit.

**Do I have to have a Servicing Area?** Yes and No. It depends on your business. Servicing Areas are required for all mobile units. Units that fall into the Risk Category 1 (e.g. prepackaged sodas, chips, ice cream) that don't require a hand sink do not have to have a servicing area if all storage can be maintained on the mobile unit (i.e. storing any food in your home is not permitted). All other mobile/portable units must return to their servicing area to conduct the activities written in the Servicing Area Contract. Activities include but are not limited to the following list: food preparation, food storage, disposal of wastewater, replenish potable water, clean unit, ware washing equipment, utensils & dishes.

**Can I have more than one Servicing Area?** No. The mobile unit operator must be able to conduct all operations at one Servicing Area. Ensure the Servicing Area you



# Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

choose has the capacity to meet all your needs.

**Do I have to return to my Servicing Area every day?** Yes. Mobile unit operators must return to the Servicing Area daily to conduct all operations lined out in the Servicing Area Agreement (e.g. clean unit dispose of waste/wastewater, refill potable water, and store TCS foods that need to be refrigerated).

**If I change Servicing Area for my mobile unit do I have to inform the WCHD?** Yes. If you want to your change Servicing Area contact the WCHD to advise on new location. Applicable forms must be completed and submitted to the WCHD. A fee will be assessed at the time of form submission. An Inspection of the Servicing Area will be conducted by WCHD inspector prior to use.

**Can I store my mobile unit at my home residence?** Contact Business Licensing and/or Code Enforcement.

**Can I provide seating for our customers outside the mobile unit?** Check Business Licensing.

**Can we set up other cooking equipment outside the mobile unit during hours of operation?** No, with the exception of generators. Cooking equipment or other accessories outside the mobile unit are not allowed. Everything that is used on the mobile food unit shall be an integral part of the unit. All storage tanks must be part of the mobile food unit.

**Are mobile unit health permits transferrable?** No. Health permits are not transferable from unit to unit, vehicle to vehicle, or person to person.

**Do I have to let the WCHD know the routes / locations of where I will be serving food?** Yes. Operator must update routes/locations annually to ensure health inspections can be completed.

**Do I have to let the WCHD know if I am changing my menu?** This is case by case. Contact your Health Inspector to help determine if you are changing Risk Categories E.g. moving from lower risk to higher risk food handling procedures. This will also determine the number of inspections you will need.

