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Department of Environmental Health  
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**REQUIREMENTS FOR FOOD SERVICE AT FESTIVALS AND SPECIAL EVENTS**

The North Carolina "Rules Governing the Sanitation of Restaurants and Other Foodhandling Establishments" require that certain food service operations located at festivals and special events obtain a **Permit to Operate** from the local health department before starting operation. *Exemptions and exceptions from these requirements are found at end of this set of instructions.* The information in this document is intended to help you understand what is needed and what will be expected of an operator while the festival or event is in progress.

A temporary food establishment means those food or drink establishments which operate in connection with a fair, carnival, circus, public exhibition, or other similar gathering for a period of 15 days or less.

**Permit to Operate:** Before the event starts, an Environmental Health Specialist will visit your site, to examine your set up and equipment placement. **It is the responsibility of each food vendor to meet these requirements.** If all requirements of the Rules have been met, a permit to operate will be issued. No food service or food preparation is allowed on the site until you have received this permit. Your acceptance of this permit constitutes agreement to keep the site as originally permitted throughout the duration of the event and that you agree to operate in accordance with all statutes, rules, regulations in 15A NCAC 18A Section .2600 and any specific conditions which may be included on the permit. During operation you may be requested to remedy problems observed by the Environmental Health Specialist; prompt compliance is required.

**Tent:** Temporary food establishments are to conduct their business inside a trailer, tent, or other approved enclosure possessing a roof which is capable of retarding rain, dust, dirt, insects, and other contaminants. All cooking, and storage items must be kept under the tent at all times.

**Screening:** Pest control measures that are approved and appropriate must be provided at all times. Tent structures should be enclosed on three sides with fine mesh or other screening that will allow air to pass. (Check with the local Fire Department to determine compliance with applicable fire codes.) An opening or parting of the screen is allowed immediately behind a stove or grill to prevent potential fire hazards. Approved fly fans may be considered as an acceptable alternative, if their use can be proved to be effective.

**Floor:** Start with a clean space and keep it clean. If a problem occurs such as a grease spill, clean it up immediately using the proper techniques; do not wash such spills down storm drains.

**Storage:** Nothing is allowed on the floor or ground except equipment with legs or non-absorbent empty crates. All storage and equipment items whether wrapped or not must be kept above the floor and under tent at all times.

**Sneeze Guards:** Food and food contact surfaces near the customer must be properly protected from customer exposure. The proper use and installation of a sneeze guard (tempered glass or something equal) positioned on the top, front, and ends may be considered acceptable. The use of plastic wrap or similar material can not be approved. Sneeze guards are not required if exposed cooking surfaces are positioned in a manner that will limit potential customer access; typically a separation of 30" is acceptable. The placement of a barrier or table, a minimum of 30" in width, between the food preparation and customer serving location is usually deemed acceptable.

**Cleaning:** All equipment must be cleaned thoroughly and maintained in a sanitary condition upon arrival and throughout the event. Running water under pressure shall be provided by a potable water or food grade hose (food grade hoses may be purchased at home improvement centers such as Lowes, Home Depot, and RV camping centers). These hoses are usually all white with a small blue stripe. Commercially bottled water can also be used. At least a single vat sink which is capable of holding the largest utensil that will be used during operation must be provided. You must have one drain board or some specific counter space to use along with the washing operation positioned adjacent to the sink. An approved equipment washing setup may be laundry type sink from a hardware store, with a table placed beside the sink for drainboard space.

**Hot Water:** Heated water must be provided for the hand-washing basin utensil sink. The minimum equipment acceptable for this provision would be a pot of water on a stove.

**Hand-washing:** Employees must be provided with a convenient way to wash their hands. This can consist of a handwashing lavatory with warm water equipped with a combination supply faucet or a wash pan. You must provide soap and disposable towels for the proper washing of hands.

**Toilets:** Convenient and approved toilets shall be provided for employees. Temporary public toilet facilities provided on the grounds are acceptable if they are reasonably convenient, adequate, and kept clean.

**Refrigeration:** Mechanical refrigeration units should be used for the storage of potentially hazardous foods. They must have thermometers and be able to maintain a temperature of 45 degrees or below. Temperatures must be monitored throughout the event by a stem-type thermometer. A cooler of approved material and construction may be accepted if the food is kept properly iced to maintain 45 degrees or below at all times. The coolers shall be drained as often as necessary to prevent foods from being submerged in ice water. Styrofoam coolers and coolers of similar construction **WILL NOT be accepted.**

**Hot Holding of Food:** Any foods that are kept hot after cooking are to be kept at 135 degrees or higher until served.

**Stem Thermometers:** All stands must provide a stem-type (0-220 degree scale). Workers should monitor food temperatures frequently. Use the thermometer to be sure that all hot and cold foods are held at approved temperatures.

**Garbage:** Watertight garbage cans with tight-fitting lids must be provided by each stand. Garbage and refuse must be removed daily and disposed of in an approved, sanitary manner.

**Wastewater and Sewage:** Wastewater from the stand must be emptied into a sanitary sewer. Do not empty storage tanks or catch buckets into storm drains or onto the ground. An approved holding tank, such as a blue holding tank for RV trailers or enclosed storage container, must be provided for holding wastewater until it may be properly discarded.

**Transport of Foods:** All foods must be protected while in transit to the permitted temporary foodservice establishment. **Precooked foods prepared off site shall only be prepared in a kitchen approved and permitted by the local health department or Department of Agriculture.** Transport containers must be able to maintain proper temperatures for a reasonable amount of time, keep out potential contamination, be non-absorbent, and easy to clean.

**Source of Foods:** All foods shall be clean, wholesome, free from adulteration, and obtained from an approved source. Wrapped sandwiches shall be obtained from an approved source. **Partial cooking or marinating of foods prior to arrival at the temporary foodservice facility is not permitted.** Foods prepared by local groups shall be prepared in an approved kitchen permitted by the local health department, and such groups shall maintain a record of the type and origin of such foods. These foods shall be prepared, transported, and stored in a sanitary manner protected from contamination and spoilage.

**Hamburgers and Poultry:** Hamburgers shall be obtained from an approved market or plant in patties separated by clean paper, or other wrapping material, and ready to cook. Additionally, poultry must be prepared for cooking in an approved market or plant. In other words, you can not make hamburger patties or cut up chicken within the stand at the event.

**Prohibited Foods: Potentially hazardous foods such as cream-filled pastries and pies, and salads such as potato, chicken, ham, crab, etc., shall not be served in a temporary food establishment.**

**Drinks:** Drinks served shall be limited to bottled or canned drinks, single-portion containers of milk, coffee, or carbonated beverages from approved dispensing devices, and other non-potentially hazardous drinks. Non-potentially hazardous beverages include but may not be limited to tea, lemonade, orangeade and smoothies prepared from commercially processed fruits or vegetables.

**Diseases:** No person who has a communicable or infectious disease that can be transmitted by foods, or who is a carrier or organisms that cause such as disease, or who has a boil, infected wound, or an acute respiratory infection with cough and nasal discharge, shall work in a temporary food establishment in any capacity in which there is a likelihood of such person contaminating food or food-contact surfaces, with disease-causing organisms or transmitting the illness to other persons.

**Worker Information:** Hair nets or caps shall be worn at all times by employees or workers preparing or serving food or drink, and no tobacco should be used in any form while in foodservice area.

**Mobile Food Units and Pushcarts:** These units already have permits to operate, but they must comply with all the requirements of their permit when operating at the event. This means that the mobile food unit permit must be posted so that it can be read by customers, and the mobile food unit must return daily to its commissary for supplies, cleaning, and servicing.

If the Mobile Food Unit or Push Cart does not comply with permit requirements for the permit which it holds, the vendor will not be allowed to operate at the event unless the temporary foodservice establishment requirements are met and a temporary foodservice establishment permit is obtained.

**Exemptions:** The following foodservice operations will not require a permit, however exempt establishments are encouraged to follow the food safety items noted in the above document:

- Facilities where only items such as; dip ice-cream, popcorn, candy apples, candy, fried apple pies, cotton candy, funnel cakes, packaged items (chips or peanuts), or soft pretzels are served.
- Facilities that prepare drinks that are not potentially hazardous served in single served containers.
- **Effective October 15, 2001** some establishments are exempt from the permitting requirements in the foodservice rules. In order to operate under the exemption, the facility must meet one of the following conditions: (i) facilities that are incorporated as nonprofit corporations in accordance with Chapter 55A of the General Statutes or (ii) that are exempt from federal income tax under the Internal Revenue Code or (iii) that are political committees as defined in G.S. 163-278.6(14). A facility meeting one of the three conditions may sell food without a permit, but is limited to selling no more frequently than two consecutive days, once per month. The once monthly operation is based on a calendar month. This continues to allow food preparation and sales by organizations such as: Churches, Civic Clubs, Service Organizations, Scouts, Booster Clubs, Fire Departments, Other Similar Non-profit Groups, Political Committee Fund Raising, Organizations Exempt From Federal Income Tax that meet the above noted requirements.

**Questions:** Please contact the Alexander County Environmental Health Department office at (828) 632-1000 Ext# 311 between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, if you have any questions on these requirements.