



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO HEALTH AGENCY

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES DIVISION

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Catering Operation Permitting and Operating Requirements

Background

A health permit to operate is required for any operation that stores, prepares, packages, serves, vends, or otherwise provides food for human consumption at the retail level.

Definitions

- **Catering Operation** means a food service that is conducted from a permanent food facility (permanent food facility) approved for food preparation where food is served, or limited food preparation is conducted, at a location other than its permitted location as part of an off-site food service event or when operating in conjunction with a host facility. **A catering operation does not include food ordered as takeout, delivery for consumer self-service, food service at a community event, or food prepared or served at a private event.**
- **Consumer** means a person who is a member of the public, takes possession of food, is not functioning in the capacity of an operator of a food facility, and does not offer the food for resale.
- **Cook-for-Hire** means a person who is hired to prepare and/or serve food at a private event. All food prepared by the cook-for-hire is handled at the location of the event*. A cook-for-hire is not a catering operation. It is not regulated by this division and does not require a health permit to operate. No food or utensils may be stored, prepared or handled at the private home of the cook-for-hire. ***A cook for hire must purchase/obtain the food immediately prior to the start of the event. Storage or handling at any location other than the event site requires a food service operation/catering permit.**
- **Retail** means the storing, preparing, serving, manufacturing, packaging, transporting, salvaging, or otherwise handling food for dispensing or sale directly to the consumer or indirectly through a delivery service.

Application Checklist:

Prior to receiving a health permit to conduct a **Catering Operation**, the following items are required:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Application for health permit | <input type="checkbox"/> Shared Permanent Food Facility Use Agreement form (dependent operators only) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health permit fee payment | <input type="checkbox"/> "Menu Items and Food Operation" form |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Valid Food Safety Certification | <input type="checkbox"/> Written Operational Procedures for Catering Operations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shared Permanent Food Facility Review form (dependent operators only) | |

Catering Operation Requirements

Catering operations must comply with applicable sections of the California Retail Food Code. All health agency permitted catering operators, employees and volunteers MUST comply with the following requirements during food preparation and all hours of operation. All health agency permitted catering operations are subject to inspection by the Environmental Health Services Division. The owner, manager, or operator of any food service operation is responsible for any action of an employee resulting in a violation of any of the food handling requirements set forth in the California Health and Safety Code.

I. General Requirements

1. Catering operation means food service or limited food preparation conducted at a site other than the permitted shared food facility, aka off-site food service activities. Catering operations may occur by either of the two circumstances:

- As part of a contracted off-site food service event.
 - Direct-to-consumer sales, if operating in conjunction with a Host facility for no more than 4 hours in any 12-hour period, unless additional hours are otherwise approved by this agency.
2. Operations, including food preparation, food, equipment, & utensil storage must be conducted from a permitted permanent food facility, such as a shared food facility, commissary, restaurant, or retail market, capable of supporting the proposed food service and type of food that is to be prepared or served.
 3. Only approved limited food preparation may be conducted at an off-site location.
 4. Prior to commencing operations, the Written Operational Procedures for Catering Operation form or an equivalent provided by the applicant, must be submitted.
 5. Food transport vehicle food holding areas must be constructed of smooth, washable, impervious material capable of withstanding frequent cleaning. The food holding area may not allow liquid wastes to drain onto any street, sidewalk, or premises. Required hot and cold holding must be maintained, except when transport lasts less than 30 minutes or when time is used as a public health control.
 6. While operating off-site, catering operations must be able to provide the name of the operation, city, state, zip code, and the name of the operator to any consumer or enforcement agency upon request.
 7. Records of all off-site food service activities must be maintained for 90 days after each event and provided to the enforcement agency upon request. The information must include:
 - A. **Location**, date, and time of the off-site food service activity.
 - B. **Customer** name, mailing & email addresses, and phone number.
 - C. **Whether** food was delivered to a customer or served at a event or Host facility.
 - D. Logs of departure and arrival temperatures, including corrective actions taken if food arrived out of **temperature**.
 - E. **Complete** menu of food provided at the off-site activity.
 8. Potable water or an adequate supply must be provided at all off-site food service activities.
 9. Ensure basic food safety while serving food including:
 - A. **Protecting** the food from contamination.
 - B. **Providing** overhead protection over all food handling areas.
 - C. **Providing** utensils for individual use and eliminate the use of community dipping containers where consumers could dip a utensil or a d=food item they have already placed in their mouth.
 - D. **Preventing** consumers; used plates or utensils from returning to the self-service display.
 - E. **Replacing** utensils that become contaminated with clean and sanitized utensils.
 - F. **Ensuring** open or potentially hazardous foods not consumed or sold by the catering operation are discarded unless the food was held at required temperatures and protected from contamination at all times.
 - G. **Discarding** any food that has become contaminated or is suspected of becoming contaminated, or that is presumed unsafe because temperatures were not maintained as required.
 10. Utensils must be food safety certified, such as NSF or equivalent. While in service, utensils must be stored either in the food with the handle extended out of the food, or on a clean surface, or in a clean container. Replace utensils every four hours or sooner if observed to be mishandled by the guest, dropped, or otherwise contaminated during the service.
 11. If the Catering operation is conducting approved limited food preparation beyond holding and portioning or dispensing food with utensils, an additional handwashing sink may be required. Handwashing sinks must provide warm water and soap & paper towels in dispensers.

12. Approved toilet and handwashing facilities are required within 200 feet in travel distance of the Catering operation. The toilet room must meet all local building and plumbing code standards, have washable floors, warm water at the sink, and soap and paper towels in dispensers.
13. All garbage and refuse generated during the food service and clean-up must be disposed in an approved manner.
14. Liquid waste must be disposed through an approved plumbing system.

For more information regarding Catering operation requirements or permitting, contact our offices during normal business hours or by email at ehs@co.slo.ca.us. You can also visit our website at <https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/ehs>.

II. Food, Equipment, and Utensils: Protection from Contamination

1. **No home-prepared food may be served.** All food must be stored and prepared, and all utensils and equipment must be stored and cleaned at the catering operator's permitted food facility.
2. At all times that the **catering operator has control over the food** (including periods of storage, preparation, transportation, and service) **all food must be adequately protected** so as to be maintained pure and free of contamination, adulteration, and spoilage.
 - A. **Utensils and equipment must be of adequate construction and design** (smooth, nonabsorbent, easily cleanable) and protected from contamination.
 - B. **Supplies** used for food preparation and service **must be of adequate construction and design** (smooth, non-absorbent, easily cleanable) **and protected** from contamination.
 - C. **Sufficient equipment** must be provided **to properly store** food and utensils during transport, storage, and service (shelves, totes with lids, pallets, crates, etc.).
 - D. **Sneeze protection** and **barbecue protection** must be provided during the catering operation.
3. Prevent cross-contamination during periods of transportation, storage, preparation, holding, service, and display.
 - A. **Keep raw foods of animal origin separated from ready-to-eat food, including raw food of animal origin** (sushi), raw produce, and cooked ready-to-eat food.
 - i. Wrap food and use covers on all containers.
 - ii. Store all raw potentially hazardous foods below all raw and cooked ready-to-eat foods.
 - iii. Use separate equipment, containers, cutting boards, etc.
 - B. **Separate** different types of raw foods of animal origin from each other.
 - i. Store raw foods of animal origin in the following order from top to bottom:
 1. Fish, seafood (top, lowest required cooking temperature),
 2. Pork,
 3. Beef,
 4. Poultry (bottom, highest required cooking temperature).
 - ii. Prepare each type of food at different times or in different areas; always prepare foods requiring a higher cooking temperature after those requiring a lower temperature.
 - C. Pre-wash:
 - i. All fruits and vegetables,
 - ii. Hermetically sealed bags and cans with visible soil prior to opening.
 - D. **Store** all food 6 inches off of the floor/ground.

- E. Store all open dry goods inside a tightly sealed container.
- 4. During pauses in food preparation or dispensing, store food preparation and dispensing utensils used with potentially hazardous foods:
 - A. In the food with their handles above the top of the food,
 - B. On a clean portion of the food preparation table or cooking equipment, ensuring that the utensils and surfaces are cleaned and sanitized as specified (in section II),
 - C. In running water with sufficient velocity to flush food particles to the drain,
 - D. In a container of water 135°F or higher.
- 5. For utensils used with non-potentially hazardous foods (ice, flour, sugar, etc.):
 - A. Keep stored in a clean, protected location when not in use,
 - B. Use scoops with handles,
 - C. Keep handles out of contact with the food being dispensed.
- 6. Vehicles used for catering operations must be maintained in a clean, sanitary condition where food is stored.
- 7. Ice used for refrigeration purposes cannot be served for consumption.
- 8. Condiments must be in pump or squeeze type containers, single-service packets, or have self-closing lids.

III. Equipment and Utensil Sanitation

- 1. All **utensils must be effectively cleaned and sanitized** as follows:
 - A. All utensils and equipment must be pre-rinsed, washed, rinsed, sanitized, and air-dried.
 - B. **Manual warewashing** must be completed **as follows**:
 - i. **First step**: Pre-scrape utensils and equipment. Clean and sanitize work surfaces.
 - ii. **First compartment, wash** using hot soapy water (above 110° F).
 - iii. **Second compartment, rinse** in clear water.
 - iv. **Third compartment, sanitize**. Manual sanitization may be performed by:
 - Immersion in a **100-ppm chlorine** solution for at least **30 seconds** (2 tsp bleach/1 gal water) or
 - Immersion in a **200-ppm quaternary ammonium** solution for at least **60 seconds** (follow instructions on label) or
 - Immersion in a **25-ppm iodine** solution for at least **60 seconds**
 - v. **Final step**: Air dry
 - C. A **mechanical dish machine** must be capable of providing both of the following:
 - i. 120°F wash water, and
 - ii. A minimum chlorine residual of 50 ppm, or
 - iii. 180°F rinse water for effective sanitizing.
- Please note: Sanitizer test strips are required** for verifying proper sanitizer concentration noted above.
- 2. Equipment, food-contact surfaces, and utensils shall be cleaned and sanitized:
 - A. Before use and between uses when working with a different type of raw food of animal origin,
 - B. Each time there is a change from working with raw foods to working with ready-to-eat foods,
 - C. Between uses with raw produce and with potentially hazardous food,
 - D. Before using or storing a food temperature measuring device,

- E. At any time during the operation when contamination may have occurred,
- F. Throughout the day or at least every four hours.

IV. Temperature Control

1. All potentially hazardous **food must be maintained at proper temperatures as listed below:**
 - A. **Cold** holding of potentially hazardous food must be held at or below **41°F**
 - B. **Hot** holding of potentially hazardous food must be held at or above **135°F**.
 - i. **All foods remaining unserved at the end of an event must be discarded.**
2. Sufficient **equipment** must be provided **to maintain required temperatures** for all perishable food during transport, storage and service (refrigerators, ice chests, steam tables, chafing dishes, etc.).
3. All potentially hazardous **food** must be **cooked** to the required **minimum cooking temperatures:**
 - A. Cooked Vegetables for hot holding: **135°F**
 - B. Seafood, beef or pork steaks, eggs: **145°F**
 - C. Ground beef or pork: **155°F**
 - D. Poultry, stuffed foods, reheated/microwaved foods: **165°F**
4. When preparation includes cooling of cooked foods, foods must be **quickly cooled from 135°F to 70°F within 2 hours**, and from **70°F to 41°F within 4 additional hours**.
 - A. **Place foods in shallow metal pans** such as stainless steel with **product 2 inches deep**.
 - B. Separate the food into **smaller or thinner portions**.
 - C. Use **rapid cooling equipment**, such as an ice paddle.
 - D. Insert appropriately designed containers in an **ice bath, stirring frequently**.
5. **Reheat** foods quickly, **within 2 hours** to a minimum temperature of **165°F**.
6. A **probe thermometer** must be provided during preparation and event operation for measuring the internal temperature of food products during cold and hot holding, cooking, cooling, and reheating.

V. Food Handlers

1. All food handlers must be **in good health**.
2. **Hands and arms** must be **washed** with cleanser and warm water before commencing work, after using toilet facilities, as often as necessary to remove soil and contamination and to prevent cross- contamination when changing tasks, or when contamination may have occurred.
3. **Hair** must be **restrained** at all times when working with unpackaged food.
4. **Outer garments** and aprons must be **clean**.

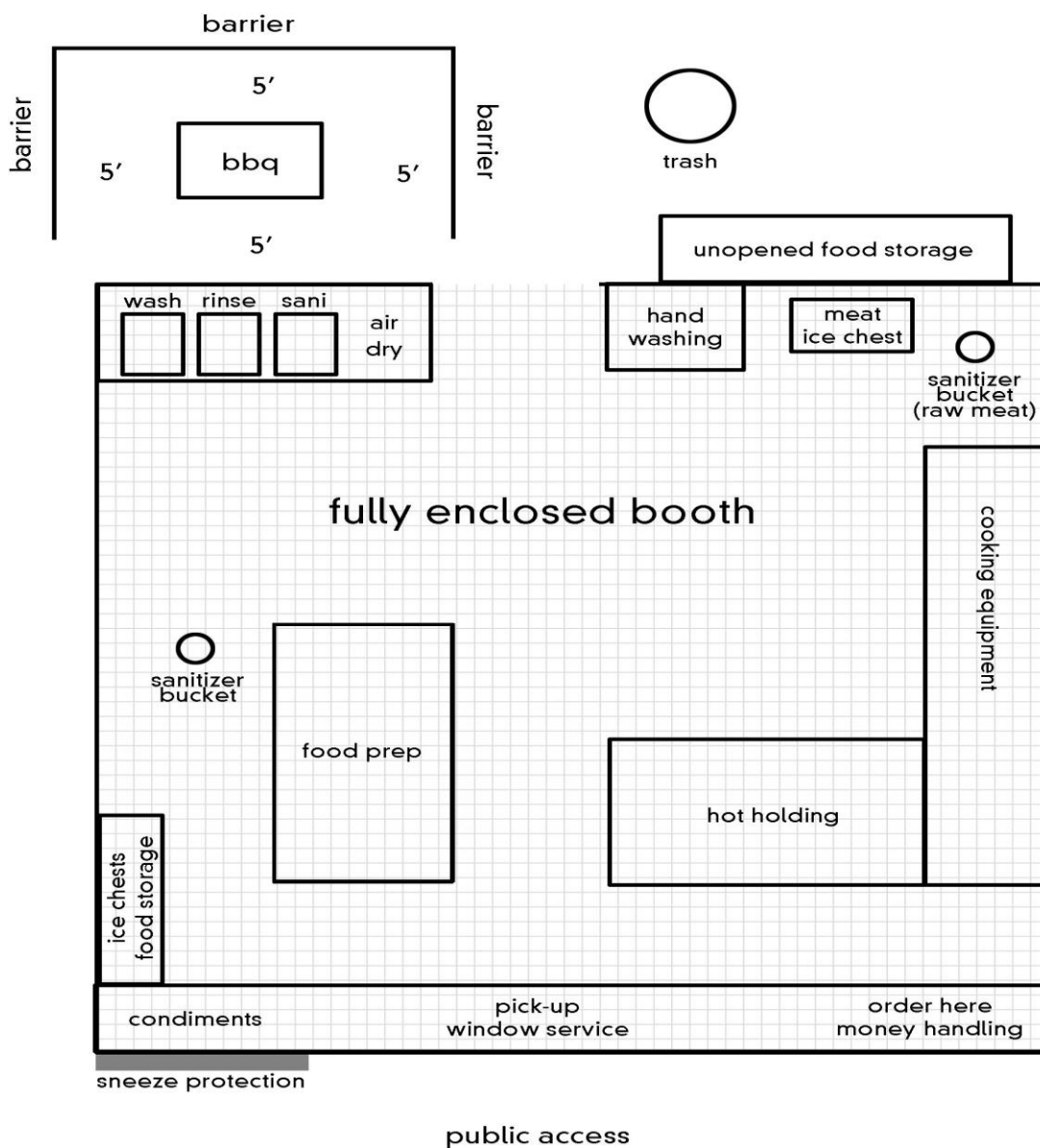
VI. Off-site Facilities/Event Locations

1. Only limited food preparation and service may occur at off-site event locations. Wherever possible, food preparation shall occur at the permanent food facility.
2. One **toilet** for every 15 employees with adequate handwashing facilities must be available within 200 feet of the catering operation event site.
3. **Garbage and wastewater receptacles** sufficient to contain all waste pending disposal must be provided during each operation. Wastewater must be discarded in an approved sewer system only.
4. To ensure food safety and protection from cross-contamination at **off-site locations** where no indoor kitchen facility or indoor fully enclosed structure is available, Environmental Health Services may require additional structural requirements as necessary. This may require operation from within a temporary food facility,

supplied with all necessary hand and ware washing facilities and operational equipment.

- A. The Temporary Food Facility **booth** should be **fully enclosed** consisting of overhead protection, walls of mesh or tarp, and washable flooring.
- B. Portable **handwashing facilities** consisting of a water container with a hands-free spigot, warmwater (100°F), a catch basin, pump soap, paper towels, and a trash receptacle should be conveniently located.
NOTE: Glove use does not substitute hand washing; Hand Sanitizer maybe used in conjunction with, but not in place of, hand washing.
- C. Portable **warewashing facilities** should be provided through one of the following methods:
 - i. Using a three-compartment sink with two integral metal drainboards, **OR**
 - ii. Utensil washing station consisting of three tubs: one with hot soapy water, one with hot rinse water, and one with sanitizer.

Below is an example of a temporary food facility setup. This setup is based on operation at community events but can be modified to accommodate a catering operation:



VII. Requirements For Catering Operations Utilizing Open Air Barbecue Units

Operation of Open-Air Barbecue Facilities is governed by the specific regulations set forth in Chapter 6 of the California Retail Food Code section 114143.

Operation of an Open-Air Barbecue Facility can be approved by the Environmental Health Services Division under the following conditions:

1. The facility is operated **in conjunction with and within reasonable proximity to** (within 200 ft.) **an acceptable and appropriate catering operation** (i.e., the catering operation is permitted and approved for food preparation. This does not apply to cook-for-hire operations).

The term “in conjunction with” means either under the **same ownership or by written agreement** between the **barbecue operator** and the **holder of the catering operation** health permit. Written agreements must specify:

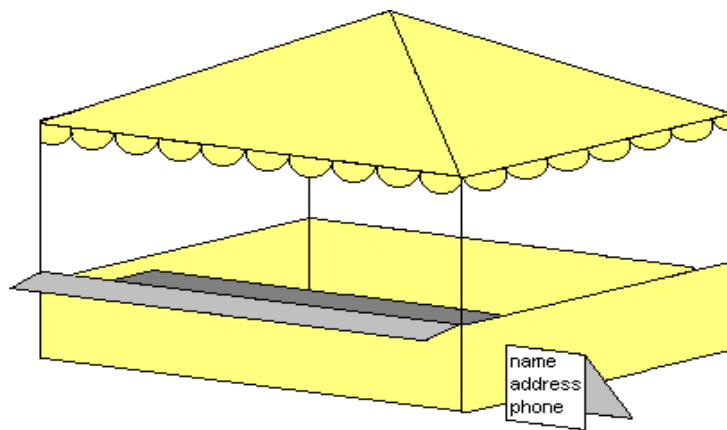
- A. That sanitary facilities, equipment and utensil washing areas and adequate refrigerated storage space is provided for the use of the BBQ operator.
- B. That the Open-Air Barbecue is subject to the requirements of Chapter 6 of the California Retail Food Code and that any violation will be against the permit issued to the approved food facility with which the barbecue operation is in conjunction.
- C. An understanding and agreement between the two parties that a serious violation with regard to the Open-Air Barbecue operation may subject the food establishment permit to possible suspension or revocation as set forth in Chapter 13 of the California Retail Food Code.
- D. An understanding and agreement between the two parties that a serious violation within the food facility that causes suspension of the health permit will mean automatic closure of the Open-Air Barbecue since there is no longer an approved supporting food facility.

Any such written agreement is subject to review and approval by the Environmental Health Services Division and must be renewed annually along with the establishment’s health permit.

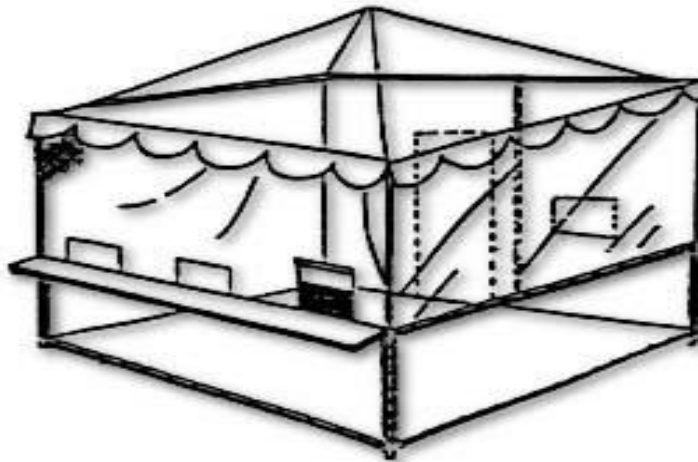
2. **The barbecue must be approved** by the Environmental Health Services Division and Fire Department.
 - A. Only Fire Department approved barbecue fuels may be used.
 - B. The cooking surface and cover must be easy to clean.
 - C. The barbecue must be located and barricaded to prevent injury to or contamination by the public.
3. Barbecues shall be used for **cooking only**. When the catering operation requires some food assembly/additional preparation or processing beyond **“pit-to-plate”** activities (i.e. cooking on and service from the grill straight to the plate), a fully enclosed structure or temporary food facility booth (see #5 below) used in conjunction with the catering operation may be required to ensure food safety and protection from cross-contamination at **off-site locations** where no indoor kitchen facility or indoor fully enclosed structure is available.
 - A. Cooking on the barbecue should be limited to items which can be cooked directly on an open grate grill (without an intermediate utensil such as a pan, except for allowed side dish, see below).
 - B. Food preparation meeting **“pit-to-plate”** standards is limited to:
 - i. Cutting apart ribs (on grill or cutting board attached to BBQ unit)
 - ii. Wrapping of grilled foods in paper or foil,
 - iii. Seasoning of food on the grill
 - iv. Portioning of side dish
 - v. Placing whole individually barbecued food items such as hotdogs, sausages, hamburgers, etc. onto/into buns.

4. **One** side dish may be served with the food(s) cooked on the grill to more or less comprise a meal:
- A. Beans, rice, vegetables, bread, etc.
 - B. Side dish must be held in and served from an appropriate container which is on the grill or part of the BBQ unit. The temperature of a hot-held potentially hazardous side dish must be maintained at or above 135°F.
5. When the catering operation meets all of the criteria listed under #3 b above, an **open-air** Temporary Food Facility booth (3 or fewer walls, see image below) is sufficient.

When the criteria listed (under #3 B– previous page) **are not met** and the Open-Air Barbecue operation requires additional preparation/processing of the food item prior to cooking or being served (i.e. preparing food prior to barbecue or slicing of tri-tip for sandwiches after barbecue), a **fully enclosed** Temporary Food Facility booth is strongly recommended (4 walls with pass-thru service window openings, see image below) within which the additional preparation/processing occurs.



Open Air Booth



Fully Enclosed Booth