

Refrigeration Guidance for Food Establishments

You need to have enough refrigeration in your food establishment to operate safely.

The amount of refrigeration you need varies for each business. Each food establishment has unique operating procedures and menus that determine refrigeration needs.

We look at several factors to determine refrigeration capacity:

- Separation of raw and ready-to-eat foods.
- Beverage storage needs.
- Amount and type of food you need to cool.
- Amount and type of food that needs refrigeration.
- Number of meals served per day.
- Shelving space.
- Where refrigeration is located.

We work with operators to help ensure facilities are set up for success.

We recommend you contact us for a consult early in the design phase. Wait to buy and install equipment until review is complete. We can provide general guidance but need your plan review application to determine how much refrigeration you need.

How do we determine refrigeration space?

When constructing a building, you cannot determine how much lumber to buy until you look at detailed plans and measurements. Determining refrigeration capacity works the same way. During plan review we look at your operating procedures in depth. This includes your menu, food preparation processes, seating capacity and other proposals. We look at how much refrigeration you plan for storing, serving, and preparing foods. After we review these factors, we let you know you if you need more refrigeration.

How much refrigeration do I need?

Refrigeration requirements vary based on the project. For example, a small coffee stand serving only coffee and espresso may need less refrigeration than a full-service restaurant.

Most food establishments need to start with at least 96 cubic feet of refrigerated storage space. You may need more refrigeration based on your specific menu and operating procedures. We add up how much space you need to store and prepare food to find out how much refrigeration you need.

- Menus with many kinds of raw meat need to have enough refrigeration space to store them safely away from ready-to-eat items.
- Cooking and cooling foods requires a walk-in cooler. Walk-in coolers move air over foods to cool them quickly and prevent other foods from warming up. An alternative to a walk-in cooler would be a blast chiller or more stand-alone coolers. The walk-in cooler must be at least 8'x8'.

What kind of refrigeration will I need?

Some menu items and processes need specific kinds of equipment.

- If your floor plan has an espresso machine, you need an under-counter cooler for easy access to refrigerated ingredients like milk. You are less likely to leave foods that need refrigeration on the counter with a cooler right below the machine.
- If you have made-to-order foods on your menu like pizza, sandwiches, or salads, you need a prep top cooler. Prep top coolers keep foods cold while being open to use ingredients.

Refrigeration needed to support specific menu items or processes is not usually part of your storage capacity needs. It is in addition to the amount needed for storage and back stock.

What if I don't have enough room to meet refrigeration requirements?

Sometimes you must decide your menu based on the size of your facility. If you don't have enough refrigeration to safely prepare your menu, you'll need to remove menu items and change preparation procedures. You may need to remove cooling steps or raw meat preparation.

Questions?

For more information or a free consult before or during your project:

- Visit our office at 3629 South D St. in Tacoma.
- Call us at (253) 649-1706.
- Email questions to food@tpchd.org.