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**Operating a Mobile Food Unit**

A mobile food unit is a restaurant on wheels. It may operate:

* At a specific location every day.
* At multiple locations throughout the week.
* Have a route, stopping at multiple locations during the day.

Mobile units do not connect to a public water system or sewer. They must operate with water in holding tank installed on the unit. They typically operate with a small menu because of the limited space in their truck.

**What are the requirements of a Mobile Food Unit?**

A mobile unit must operate from a permitted Commissary Kitchen. You will use a Commissary Kitchen to prepare menu items. This includes:

* Produce rinsing.
* Raw meat preparation.
* To fill and empty water holding tanks.
* Daily cleaning of the mobile unit.

Cooling of foods occurs at the commissary because of the limited space on the mobile unit. You must serve or discard all foods cooked or reheated on the mobile unit the same day. The Sale Site, or operating location, must have restroom access for employees. If you offer seating for customers, they must also have access to the restroom.

Read [Washington State Department of Labor and Industries (LNI) notice to all food trucks and trailer operators](https://tpchd.org/?p=36758).

**What equipment will I need on the mobile unit?**

Even with a smaller menu, mobile units must have enough equipment onboard to safely prepare their menu. This includes:

* A handwash sink and 3-compartment sink for washing dishes.
* Cooking and hot holding equipment.
* Refrigeration space for storage and service of your menu items.

**What equipment will I need at my commissary kitchen?**

The commissary kitchen must have everything needed to support your food business.

* Sinks.
* Refrigeration.
* Cooking equipment.
* A walk-in cooler to support most operators, menus and processes.

**How much refrigeration will I need?**

Mobile units operate out of 2 kitchens; the mobile truck or trailer and the commissary. Each location requires specific refrigeration.

* **On the mobile unit**—You must have 2 refrigeration units. Typically, this includes a prep top cooler and a refrigerator with at least 24 cubic feet of capacity. The prep top cooler is used for the service of your menu items. The additional unit holds the back stock needed to operate for the day.
* **At the commissary kitchen**—You need space to store raw and prepared ingredients plus space in the walk-in cooler to cool foods made in advance.

**Can I operate a mobile unit without a commissary kitchen?**

Mobile units with a small menu, like coffee and espresso or hot dogs, may qualify to be commissary exempt. A commissary-exempt mobile unit must have everything on board to support their operation. This includes all:

* Storage.
* Preparation.
* Service of food.
* Cleaning of food service items.

A commissary-exempt mobile unit needs to have an approved servicing location to fill and empty water tanks and for mop sink access to clean the mobile unit. Do not store foods and food service items at a servicing location or private residence. They must remain onboard.

**Does my permit allow me to operate anywhere in Washington?**

You must have a permit in each county you operate in. If you have a valid permit in another county in Washington and would like to operate in Pierce County, you may apply for [Plan Review Reciprocity](https://tpchd.org/healthy-places/food-safety/mobile-food-units/plan-review-reciprocity/).

**Questions?**

Contact us at (253) 649-1706 or [food@tpchd.org](mailto:food@tpchd.org).