

Mobile Food Unit – Plan Review Guidance.

This Mobile Food Plan Review Guidance document is an effort to assist potential owners and operators of mobile food units of design elements required by the VDH Food Regulations. Please review carefully before investing in a mobile food unit to be sure the unit is properly equipped to safely serve the type of menu and operations you envision. [VDH Food Regulations](https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/environmental-health/food-safety-in-virginia/food-regulations/) can be found at <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/environmental-health/food-safety-in-virginia/food-regulations/>

***An operator intending to seek approval for a mobile food unit permit is required to complete an application and submit plans to the Health Department for review.**

Mobile food unit is a food establishment mounted on wheels, readily moveable from place to place at all times during operation and shall include, but not be limited to, pushcarts, trailers, trucks, or vans. The unit, all operations, and all equipment must be integral to and be within or attached to the unit.

Base of Operation - Servicing area. An operating base location to which a mobile unit returns regularly for such things as vehicle and equipment cleaning, discharging liquid or solid wastes, refilling water tanks and ice bins, and boarding food. A service area is not required to obtain a health department permit. Food for the mobile unit CANNOT be prepared in the servicing area. Only Fully Self-Contained Mobile Food Units may use a servicing area.

Base of Operation - Commissary. A catering establishment, food establishment, or any other place in which food, food containers, or supplies are kept, handled, prepared, packaged, or stored. If ALL functions of cooking, holding, and storage are not done IN the mobile unit, a commissary is required. A commissary must be permitted as a Food Establishment by the Virginia Department of Health. Approval is needed before the mobile unit may use a commissary. The mobile food unit is to be permitted in the jurisdiction where the commissary is located. A written agreement to use a commissary owned by another entity will be required.

Pushcart - means any wheeled vehicle or device other than a motor vehicle or trailer that may be moved with or without the assistance of a motor and that does not require registration by the department of motor vehicles.

The types of food served from a pushcart will be carefully evaluated with the equipment capabilities and may be limited to NON-TCS type foods. The unit, all onsite operations, and all equipment must be integral to and be within or attached to the unit. A pushcart requires a commissary where wares can be washed; waste water and solid waste can be discharged; and where food, supplies and unit can be stored when not in operation.

TCS Food -Time/temperature control for safety food - means a food that requires time/temperature control for safety to limit pathogenic microorganism growth or toxin formation. i.e. meats, cheeses, soups, cooked vegetables, rice, cooked pasta, sliced raw fruits, etc.

Non TCS Food- includes food that does not require time/temperature control for safety such as baked goods, snack items, cotton candy, snow cones, popcorn, etc.

Requirements of Mobile Food Units Compared to Pushcarts

	Mobile Unit Fully Self Contained	Mobile Unit Utilizing commissary	Push Cart
Water Supply Required	Yes	Yes	Yes
Handwashing Sink Required	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dishwashing / 3 basins required	Yes – on mobile unit. Large enough to fit all equipment.	Yes – on mobile unit. May also use commissary for large items.	Yes - at commissary. Not required on pushcart.
Base of Operations - Servicing Area	Yes - Servicing Area	Servicing Area is at Commissary	Servicing Area is at Commissary
Base of Operations - Commissary *Current VDH Food Permit	Not required	Yes –Commissary	Yes –Commissary
Menu / Food Operations - including storage of food and single-service items	All Food operations in mobile unit	All Food operations in mobile unit and/or commissary	Limited to equipment capabilities / Non TCS Foods

Mobile Unit Construction / Physical Facility

Construction and Materials:

Everything necessary for the operation must be integral to and be within or attached to unit.

Mobile unit must be designed to protect food from potential contaminants.

Mobile unit must be constructed in such a manner that all joints are fully sealed.

All openings to the outside must be screened or fitted with other devices to repel or prevent the entrance of flies, insects, and vermin (except when foods are being served through a service window).

Construction materials and all surfaces must be smooth, non-absorbent, and easily cleanable; preferably consisting of smooth material such as stainless steel or plastic.

All mobile units must provide proper equipment for storage and temperature control for all food on menu, equipment and single-service items.

Lighting:

Sufficient lighting is required. At least 20 foot candles (220 lux) inside equipment such as reach-in and under-counter refrigerators and areas used for handwashing, warewashing, and equipment and utensil storage; and at least 50 candles (540 lux) at a surface where a food employee is working with food or working with utensils or equipment such as knives or slicers or employee safety is a factor.

All lights must be either coated bulbs or shielded to preclude accidental breakage over food and equipment.

Sinks, Water Tanks and Hoses:

Every mobile unit or pushcart where food is handled must have a handwashing sink with pumped hot (100 °F) and cold running water, dispensed soap, paper towels, and a waste basket.

A three compartment washing sink is required for a mobile unit and available for use in push cart commissaries. **It must be large enough to accommodate the immersion of the largest equipment and utensils.** It must have integrated drain boards, utensil racks, or tables large enough to accommodate utensil holding before cleaning and after sanitizing, and accommodate all soiled and cleaned items that may accumulate during the hours of operation.

A potable water and waste water tank is required for all units. The volume of the wastewater tank must be 15 % larger than the volume of the potable water storage tank.

Potable Water Hose and Clean Water Tank must be cleaned and sanitized before being used and cannot be used for any other purposes. The inlet on the clean water tank is to be ¾” in diameter or less and protected using a cover when not in use.

Removing Mobile Unit Waste water generated by melted ice, condensation, handwashing, ware washing and other liquid wastes must be collected in waste retention tanks and properly disposed of at the approved commissary or servicing area. Waste water drain needs to be 1” in diameter or greater, sloped to drain and have a shut-off valve.

Mobile units must contain a food-grade potable water hose (i.e. white NSF approved) that is stored on the mobile unit in a clean manner and used with proper back-flow prevention. Clearly label hose and tank “drinking water use only”.

Potable water source as indicated on Base of Operations Agreement must be approved before use.

Equipment Capabilities:

Equipment must be smooth, easily-cleanable, durable and safe for its intended use.

Drainage ports for ice containers must be provided.

Refrigeration is required to maintain all **TCS Food** at 41⁰F or less at all times. An accurate thermometer is required for all refrigeration units.

Hot Holding equipment is required to maintain **TCS Food** at 135⁰F or hotter at all times.

Cooking/Reheating. Only menu items that can be properly cooked or reheated may be served. A food thermometer must be available and used to check internal food temperatures.

Cooking that produces grease-laden vapors require a hood and will need approval from the Fire Marshall.

Cooling. Only menu items that can be properly cooled may be served. In most cases, proper cooling will need the use of a commissary kitchen.

Ample shelving and space for storage of food, equipment and single-service items on the mobile unit or in approved commissary. Items must be stored 6” off the ground and in an area not subject to potential contamination.

Approved Sources:

Approved Water Supply-The Health Department will evaluate the water supply at the commissary or servicing area to ensure it is adequately designed for the proposed use. If a private water supply is being considered, it will be evaluated to assure it meets the minimum requirements necessary for food establishments. Periodic water tests may be required for private water supplies.

Food and Ice must be purchased from an approved source, i.e., USDA, VDACS, or Health Department permitted food establishment. Home prepared foods are not allowed. No food prepared or stored in a private home can be used, stored, served, offered for sale, sold, or given away in a food facility.

Approved Sewage Disposal System Required:

The Health Department will evaluate the sewer facilities at the commissary or servicing area to ensure it is adequately designed for the proposed use. If a septic system is being considered, it will be evaluated to assure it can handle the proposed volume and strength of the wastewater from your unit. This will be based on your menu and an evaluation of the potential daily volume of wastewater and other facilities served by the system.

Servicing Area:

Must be clean, well maintained, properly constructed, fixed, designated area where each mobile unit reports to daily or as needed for servicing operations, which includes:

- Proper cleaning and servicing of the mobile food unit
- Proper flushing and disposal of accumulated liquid wastes
- Providing potable water necessary to the operation of the unit

Commissary:

Current VDH Food establishment permit. **Home based operations are not allowed.**

All mobile food units utilizing a commissary and pushcart return to a commissary where:

- Foods served from the unit are stored, handled or prepared
- Single service articles are properly stored
- All food contact surfaces are washed, rinsed and sanitized

Commissaries complying with the requirements of a servicing area may also be used for servicing operations.

Frequently referenced sections of the [VDH Food Regulations](https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/environmental-health/food-safety-in-virginia/food-regulations/) found in its entirety at <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/environmental-health/food-safety-in-virginia/food-regulations/>

"Commissary" means a catering establishment, food establishment, or any other place in which food, food containers, or supplies are kept, handled, prepared, packaged, or stored for distribution to satellite operations.

"Food establishment" includes (i) an element of the operation such as a transportation vehicle or a central preparation facility that supplies a vending location or satellite feeding location; (ii) an operation that is conducted in a mobile, stationary, temporary, or permanent facility or location where consumption is on or off the premises and regardless of whether there is a charge for the food; and (iii) a facility that does not meet the exemption criteria identified in subdivision 6 of this definition or a facility that meets the exemption requirements but chooses to be regulated under this chapter.

.....2. Any place or operation that prepares or stores food for distribution to persons of the same business operation or of a related business operation for service to the public. Examples of such places or operations include but are not limited to operations preparing or storing food for catering services, push cart operations, hotdog stands, and other mobile points of service. Such mobile points of service are also deemed to be restaurants unless the point of service and of consumption is in a private residence.

"Mobile food unit" means a food establishment mounted on wheels (excluding boats in the water) readily moveable from place to place at all times during operation and shall include, but not be limited to, pushcarts, trailers, trucks, or vans. The unit, all operations, and all equipment must be integral to and be within or attached to the unit.

"Servicing area" means an operating base location to which a mobile food establishment or transportation vehicle returns regularly for such things as vehicle and equipment cleaning, discharging liquid or solid wastes, refilling water tanks and ice bins, and boarding food.

12VAC5-421-2160. Alternative Water Supply.

Water meeting the requirements specified under 12VAC5-421-2050 through 12VAC5-421-2130 shall be made available for a mobile facility, for a temporary food establishment without a permanent water supply, and for a food establishment with a temporary interruption of its water supply through:

- 1. A supply of containers of commercially bottled drinking water;^{Pf}*
- 2. One or more closed portable water containers;^{Pf}*
- 3. An enclosed vehicular water tank;^{Pf}*
- 4. An on-premises water storage tank;^{Pf} or*
- 5. Piping, tubing, or hoses connected to an adjacent approved system in a manner approved by the department.^{Pf}*

Article 3. Mobile Water Tank and Mobile Food Establishment Water Tank

12VAC5-421-2360. Mobile Water Tank Approved Materials.

Materials that are used in the construction of a mobile water tank, mobile food establishment water tank, and appurtenances shall be:

1. Safe;^P
2. Durable, corrosion resistant, and nonabsorbent; and
3. Finished to have a smooth, easily cleanable surface.

12VAC5-421-2370. Enclosed System, Sloped to Drain.

A mobile water tank shall be:

1. Enclosed from the filling inlet to the discharge outlet; and
2. Sloped to an outlet that allows complete drainage of the tank.

12VAC5-421-2380. Inspection and Cleaning Port, Protected and Secured.

If a water tank is designed with an access port for inspection and cleaning, the opening shall be in the top of the tank and:

1. Flanged upward at least one-half inch (13 mm); and
2. Equipped with a port cover assembly that is:
 - a. Provided with a gasket and a device for securing the cover in place, and
 - b. Flanged to overlap the opening and sloped to drain.

12VAC5-421-2390. "V" Type Threads, Use Limitation.

A fitting with "V" type threads on a water tank inlet or outlet shall be allowed only when a hose is permanently attached.

12VAC5-421-2400. Tank Vent, Protected.

If provided, a water tank vent shall terminate in a downward direction and shall be covered with:

1. 16 mesh to 1-inch (16 mesh to 25.4 mm) screen or equivalent when the vent is in a protected area; or
2. A protective filter when the vent is in an area that is not protected from windblown dirt and debris.

12VAC5-421-2410. Inlet and Outlet, Sloped to Drain.

A. A water tank and its inlet and outlet shall be sloped to drain.

B. A water tank inlet shall be positioned so that it is protected from contaminants such as waste discharge, road dust, oil, or grease.

12VAC5-421-2420. Hose, Construction and Identification.

A hose used for conveying potable water from a water tank shall be:

1. Safe;^P
2. Durable, corrosion resistant, and nonabsorbent;
3. Resistant to pitting, chipping, crazing, scratching, scoring, distortion, and decomposition;
4. Finished with a smooth interior surface; and
5. Clearly and durably identified as to its use if not permanently attached.

12VAC5-421-2440. Protective Cover or Device.

A cap and keeper chain, closed cabinet, closed storage tube, or other approved protective cover or device shall be provided for a water inlet, outlet, and hose.

12VAC5-421-2450. Mobile Food Establishment Tank Inlet.

A mobile food establishment's water tank inlet shall be:

1. Three-fourths inch (19.1 mm) in inner diameter or less; and
2. Provided with a hose connection of a size or type that will prevent its use for any other service.

12VAC5-421-2460. System Flushing and Disinfection.

A water tank, pump, and hoses shall be flushed and sanitized before being placed in service after construction, repair, modification, and periods of nonuse.^P

12VAC5-421-2470. Using a Pump and Hoses, Backflow Prevention.

A person shall operate a water tank, pump, and hoses so that backflow and other contamination of the water supply are prevented.

12VAC5-421-2480. Protecting Inlet, Outlet, and Hose Fitting.

If not in use, a water tank and hose inlet and outlet fitting shall be protected using a cover or device as specified under [12VAC5-421-2440](#).

12VAC5-421-2490. Tank, Pump, and Hoses, Dedication.

A. Except as specified in subsection B of this section, a water tank, pump, and hoses used for conveying drinking water shall be used for no other purpose.^P

B. Water tanks, pumps, and hoses approved for liquid foods may be used for conveying drinking water if they are cleaned and sanitized before they are used to convey water.

Article 4. Sewage, Other Liquid Waste, and Rainwater

12VAC5-421-2500. Mobile Holding Tank Capacity and Drainage.

A sewage holding tank in a mobile food establishment shall be:

1. Sized 15% larger in capacity than the water supply tank; and
2. Sloped to a drain that is 1 inch (25 mm) in inner diameter or greater, equipped with a shut-off valve.

12VAC5-421-2550. Removing Mobile Food Establishment Wastes.

No public health hazard or nuisance shall result when sewage and other liquid wastes are removed from a mobile food establishment at an approved waste servicing area or by a permitted sewage transport vehicle.^{Pf}

12VAC5-421-2790. Indoor Areas; Surface Characteristics.

A. Except as specified in subsection B of this section, materials for indoor floor, wall, and ceiling surfaces under conditions of normal use shall be:

1. Smooth, durable, and easily cleanable for areas where food establishment operations are conducted;
2. Closely woven and easily cleanable carpet for carpeted areas; and
3. Nonabsorbent for areas subject to moisture such as food preparation areas, walk-in refrigerators, warewashing areas, toilet rooms, mobile food establishment servicing areas, and areas subject to flushing or spray cleaning methods.

12VAC5-421-2800. Outdoor Areas; Surface Characteristics.

- A. The outdoor walking and driving areas shall be surfaced with concrete, asphalt, or gravel or other materials that have been effectively treated to minimize dust, facilitate maintenance, and prevent muddy conditions.*
- B. Exterior surfaces of buildings and mobile food establishments shall be of weather-resistant materials and shall comply with law.*