



Mobile Food Service Establishments (Food Trucks) Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How do I get started with a Mobile Food Service (food truck) in Georgia?

A: First, determine the local ordinances for where you want to operate. Some cities and counties do not allow mobile food units/trucks – these are separate from health department requirements. You can review local ordinances through the city or county planning and zoning office.

Next, you are required to have a Base of Operation or Commissary. It should be within a reasonable distance from where you want to operate your unit/truck, since you will need to make daily trips to dump wastewater, refill water tanks and restock supplies.

The final step is to obtain permits from the health department for your Base of Operation *and* your unit/truck. (*It is highly recommended that you do this before you invest any money.*)

Q: How do I obtain the required permits from the health department?

A: You are required to apply for permits for your Base of Operation and your unit/truck at the health department in the county where you will operate. You will need to submit your menu, a to-scale diagram or sketch of the layout of the Base of Operation and the unit/truck, and pay any permitting fees charged by the health department.

If you plan to operate your unit/truck in a different county than your Base of Operation, apply in that county for your unit/truck. A copy of your permit and last inspection report for the Base of Operation will be needed to obtain a unit/truck permit in a different county.

Q: Why do I have to have a Base of Operation? Can I share a base or an existing restaurant's equipment or space?

A: The permit holder for each mobile food service unit/truck is required to have his or her own Base of Operation where wastewater from the unit/truck will be dumped and water tanks refilled. The Base is also the place where you will store and/or prepare food, and wash, rinse and sanitize any dishes or utensils that are too big to be washed on the unit/truck. Cleaning and servicing the unit/truck will also be done at the Base of Operation. The permit holder must return to their Base of Operation daily. Sharing space or equipment is not allowed due to liability and for traceback purposes should there be a foodborne illness outbreak. Two separate permit holders are not allowed to share equipment and space.

Q: Do I need a full commercial kitchen at my Base of Operation if I'm only selling hot dogs or snow cones?

A: The absolute minimum that is required at a Base of Operation is a dump station or mop sink, a handwashing sink, and a potable fresh water supply tap. Your menu and the equipment you have in your unit/truck will determine what else may be needed at your Base of Operation. During the plan review, the health department will let you know if other equipment is required at your Base of Operation.

Q: Can my Base of Operation be at my house?

A: It depends. The Georgia Food Service Rules and Regulations prohibit food service establishment operations conducted in a private home or in a room used as living or sleeping quarters. However, if local zoning and other ordinances allow for the use of your private property as a Base of Operation, and you have an area that is completely separate from residential use (e.g., an outbuilding in your yard), then the health department may allow you to use your property as a Base of Operation. You may be required to make modifications to your septic system or sewer for wastewater disposal and provide proof that water from your individual well meets drinking water standards set forth by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, if your home is not served by a municipal drinking water supply.

Q: Why do I need to obtain a permit for each county in which I operate my unit/truck?

A: The Georgia Department of Public Health has delegated the responsibility of permitting and inspecting all food service establishments (including mobile food units/trucks) to county boards of health. Since a food service permit is required to prepare and serve food in Georgia, the county health departments issue these permits and, as a result, have the jurisdictional authority and responsibility to conduct inspections for all food service permits issued in their county.

Q: Where can I park my unit/truck when I'm not using it?

A: When the unit/truck is not in use, it can be stored at your Base of Operation or another location that has been approved by the health department.

Q: Can I just drive around and serve food anywhere in the county for which I have a permit?

A: Wherever you plan to stage your unit/truck to sell food, you must have written approval from the property owner. You must ensure that a working restroom is within 200 feet and have a written restroom agreement from the business that allows you and your employees to have access during the time you are there. (If tables are provided for customers, then the restroom must be available to them as well.) Finally, you must inform the health department of all vending locations and times for your unit/truck.

For more information: A list of Environmental Health offices are located here:

<https://dph.georgia.gov/sites/dph.georgia.gov/files/EnvHealth/Misc/EnvHealthContactInformation2019-03-13.pdf>.

A copy of the Georgia Food Service Rules and Regulations can be downloaded:

<https://dph.georgia.gov/sites/dph.georgia.gov/files/EnvHealth/Food/Rules/EnvHealthFoodRules511-6-1Final.pdf>.