



HARRISON COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

FOOD PROTECTION

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WWW.HARRISONCOUNTYHEALTH.COM

SUBJECT: Hot dog carts / pushcarts

People call the health department all the time wanting to set up a hotdog cart to sell food to the public. It's not as easy as it originally seems and there are a lot of rules that have to be followed. The cart must meet certain standards, and it can get very expensive retrofitting an old or inexpensive rig. The great deal you got on that cart may not seem so great when you consider all you have to do to bring it up to health code standards. The Indiana Food Code applies to hotdog carts and grills as well as restaurants, and can be found online at our website: www.harrisoncountyhealth.com → Food Safety → Indiana Retail Food Code 410 IAC 7-24.



According to Section 113 of this code, a mobile retail food establishment (pushcart) must be physically transported to a commissary or servicing area at least once a day for supplies, cleaning, and servicing operations, unless all that is served is food prepackaged in individual servings (chips, candy, etc.) or beverages that are not potentially hazardous (canned or bottled soft drinks).

In other words, pushcarts and mobile food units must operate in conjunction with a permitted food handling establishment, referred to, in this case, as a "commissary". Restaurants or grocery stores are the most commonly used types of commissaries, but in some cases, a church kitchen may be inspected by the health department and approved for use as a commissary. A private home or garage may not be used. The commissary must provide written documentation to the health department stating their agreement to allow use of their establishment for the purpose of servicing the pushcart or mobile food unit. The pushcart or mobile food units must return daily to the commissary to obtain potable water, to empty gray water, and wash and sanitize utensils and equipment used by the unit. For mobile food units, a potable water hose shall be provided and must meet National Sanitation Foundation food-grade specifications and be stored in a sanitary manner. Wastewater must be emptied into approved wastewater facilities.

If it is found that the commissary does not have adequate facilities to service the pushcart or mobile unit, a permit will not be issued. The mobile food unit must operate in conjunction with a commissary whose hours of operation allow that mobile food unit access to the facility for servicing. A daily record of visits is recommended to be maintained.

Furthermore, no food to be served by the pushcart or mobile food unit can be prepared at home. All food must be prepared on-site or at the commissary and the leftovers must be thrown away at the end of the day. Only hot dogs or commercially pre-cooked sausage can be prepared on a pushcart. Coleslaw and chili must be stored in their original containers, unless prepared by the commissary. They must be kept at proper temperatures ($\leq 41^{\circ}$ F for cold foods and $\geq 135^{\circ}$ F for hot foods). This also must be documented.

Some of the food code items pertaining to a pushcart include, but are not limited to:

- problems related to insect and rodent control
- proper disposal of grease and food droppings
- proper disposal of wastewater – it can't be dumped in street drains, storm sewer drains, or onto the ground. A holding tank is required.

- proper lighting during certain periods of operation
- lack of physical barriers against contamination
- overhead cover to protect from bird/other droppings while cart is in use
- required proper handwashing and warewashing facilities
- hot and cold water
- holding of potentially hazardous food at proper temperatures before and after cooking
- the potential for dust and other filth contamination for food and equipment
- all food prepared for sale at this type of facility must be refrigerated and/or cooked there – food for sale to the public cannot be cooked in a private home
- How is cart stored between uses? Covered? Kept in a garage? Free from rodents/insects?
- If you serve certain foods and operate more than 15 days a year, you must have a certified food handler. Cost for the class and exam – approximately \$160, but certification is good for 5 years.

Cooking equipment is also required to meet the structural design and fabrication requirements of retail food rules (NSF standards). Used oil drums and similar containers that may have been used for hazardous products may present a public health hazard and may not be used.

Food operators should be aware that any sanitation practices that they conduct knowingly in violation of state food rules will make their business extremely vulnerable to litigation should an illness attributable to their facility occur.

This information is by no means complete – for complete Indiana food rules, be sure to see the food code at the above mentioned website. This information is simply intended to get you thinking. Can your facility meet minimum food code standards? If not, what do you need to do to meet them? How many hotdogs/hamburgers etc., will you have to sell at \$1.00 or \$2.00 apiece to make your investment back? To be profitable? Do you have a place to sell your food? How much is rental for a spot at a festival? Can you get in to a festival? -- there are waiting lists for many. Have you gotten proper permission to place your cart on a particular site? Do potential customers frequent that site?

There are a lot of things to think about. We just want to help you think about them before you take that financial plunge. If you have any questions, call 812-738-3237, extension 1013, Monday thru Friday from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM.