

OPERATING A MOBILE FOOD UNIT IN THE CITY OF HOUSTON

WHAT IS A MOBILE FOOD UNIT ?

Mobile food Unit shall mean a food service establishment that is vehicle-mounted or wheeled and is capable of being readily moveable.

MOBILE FOOD UNIT CLASSIFICATIONS:

Restricted = individual servings packaged food, non-TCS (time and temperature control for safety) beverages dispensed from protected equipment; packaged TCS milk/milk products; prepackaged individual servings frozen dessert products.

Examples: Ice cream trucks, tricycles, push carts, trucks, carts, fixed location/park vendor units.

Unrestricted = prepares/serves open foods on the unit , water systems for handwashing and equipment cleaning, plumbing installed on unit, must report to an approved commissary to fill/drain/flush water tank.

Examples: Trailers, buses, trucks, corn roasters, carts, fixed location/park vendor units.

STARTING YOUR MOBILE FOOD UNIT

Before you build a mobile food unit yourself, hire a custom builder, remodel, or make a purchase, contact the Bureau of Consumer Health Services, Mobile Food Unit Program at 832-393-5100. You or the builder will need to know the requirements for your particular mobile food unit type and intended menu. Having this knowledge will save you money.

A City of Houston Food Service Medallion is Required for all Mobile Food Units.

Unrestricted units require 2 sets of plans to be submitted to the Houston Health Department for approval prior to construction. Requirements include: approved food equipment/installation; walls/floors/ceilings/plumbing; menu disclosure; notarized letters authorizing use of private property and employee access to a restroom facility; commissary receipts to verify servicing 24 hours prior to operations.

Some foods may be prohibited – extensive food preparation/ raw foods such as sushi/ceviche.

NO FOODS PREPARED/STORED AT HOME OR UNAPPROVED FACILITY ON ANY TYPE OF UNIT

Restricted units do not require plans; no visits to a commissary; must not prepare/repackage foods/no utensils/grills/hot plates.

Only Frozen Dessert units may operate on the street or sidewalk. Only sell individual prepackaged frozen dessert products. Trucks must have flashing lights and Caution Children signs; stop long enough to make sell/dispense product. Tricycles and push carts must be non-motorized; operate on sidewalks.

The following pages contain descriptions of the basic requirements for all units. The complete list of requirements is found in the City of Houston Food Ordinance, Chapter 20, Section 20-22.

Unrestricted Conventional Unit Requirements Include



Plans submitted for approval by health department for new/remodeled unit.

Plumbing/water systems for 2 or 3 compartment sink, hand sink, plumbing lines properly installed, hot and cold running water, fresh and waste water tanks.

Menu disclosure and operational procedures; list of all foods being served/prepared; cooling/thawing/reheating procedures; hot/cold holding/cooking temperatures.

Walls, floors, ceilings (smooth, easily cleanable, non-absorbent); no exposed utility lines, service lines and conduits; walls and ceilings light color = 40% or more light reflective value.

Lighting= 50 foot candles and shielding.

Counters/cabinets/shelving – durable, corrosion-resistant, smooth, easily cleanable.

Equipment – commercial grade type approved NSF or equivalent design/construction; smooth/easily cleanable, non-absorbent; install commercial grade ventilation hood.

Operate from an approved commissary; servicing of unit 24 hours prior to operations; drain/flush/fill water tanks; receipts for servicing must be maintained on the unit for 1 year. Disposal of wastes (liquid and solid) at commissary only.

Locations of operations submitted to the health department. Written notification submitted to the department 2 days prior to relocating.

Notarized property letter authorizing use if at the location for > 1 hour per day; notarized letter authorizing restroom use by employees at a business within 500 feet of unit if at the location for > 1 hour per day.

Foods prepared/stored on unit/ approved commissary/permitted food establishment.

Food Service Certified Manager and Food Handler Certification required.

Must demonstrate mobility.

Private property only - no streets/sidewalks.

Restricted Conventional Unit (Non-Frozen Dessert Vehicle) Requirements Include



Foods prepared and packaged from an approved commissary/food establishment.

Non-TCS beverages dispensed from covered urns or other protected equipment.

TCS individual servings of milk/milk products/coffee cream packaged from plant.

Pre-packaged individual servings of frozen dessert products.

Any TCS stored at 41°F. or below or 135°F. or above to have thermometer to measure hot/cold air temperature.

No utensils/grills/hot plates; no preparing/repackaging/portioning of foods.

Commissary receipts not required.

No Food Service Certified Manager; no Food handler required.

Operate on private property; no sales on streets/sidewalks.

Restricted Conventional (Frozen Dessert Mobile Food Units) Requirements Include



Frozen dessert products pre- packaged individual servings (popsicles, ice-cream bars, cones, serving cups) from approved facility. NO OTHER FOODS (beverages, snacks, candy, open foods).

Commissary receipts/visits not required.

These are the only mobile food units allowed to operate on streets or sidewalks.

TRUCKS/TRICYCLES

Streets only

CAUTION CHILDREN sign/Warning lights Red and Yellow

Stop long enough to make immediate sale/dispense product

May not operate in SCHOOL CROSSING ZONE

PUSH CARTS

Non-motorized

Operate on sidewalk

May not operate on park sidewalks or within Theater/Entertainment District without additional permit/license.

No commissary receipts/visits required.

No Food Service certified manager, no Food Handler required.

Fixed Location and Licensed Park Vendor Mobile Food Units (Unrestricted and Restricted)



FIXED LOCATION

	UNRESTRICTED	RESTRICTED
Operates on premises of a permitted food establishment	✓	✓
Shall not exceed 4ft W x 8ft L x 8ft H	✓	✓
Easily moveable by one person when fully loaded	✓	✓
Plans submitted for approval by Health Department	✓	NA
Plumbing/sink/lavatory/water system	✓	NA
Cart stored in food establishment servicing area	✓	NA
Return to commissary once per day for servicing	✓	NA
Food Manager/Food Handler required	✓	NA

LICENSED PARK VENDOR

(May only operate in a City of Houston Park with approval from Parks and Recreation Department)

Park Food Vendor in accordance to Article IX,Chapter 32	✓	✓
Shall not exceed 4ft W x 8ft L x 8ft H	✓	✓
Easily moveable by one person when fully loaded	✓	✓
Plans submitted for approval by Health Department	✓	NA
Plumbing/sink/lavatory/water system	✓	NA
Cart stored in food establishment servicing area	✓	NA
Return to commissary once per day for servicing	✓	NA
Food Manager/Food Handler required	✓	NA

INSPECTIONS

- All new, renewal, and change of owner medallion inspections are conducted at the Environmental Inspection Center, 7427 Park Place Blvd., Tuesday and Thursday. Only units that arrive from 7:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m. will be inspected.
- Documents operators must present at check-in include commissary receipt, current driver's license, proof of insurance, fees for medallion and water sample (if applicable). All fees must be paid when initial check-in is complete.
- Unrestricted units must perform commissary servicing within 24 hours before reporting to the Park Place facility – valid receipt must be presented.
- Water samples are taken from all unrestricted mobile food units.
- Must pass HFD inspection if propane is used.
- Medallion is issued if the unit passes both the Fire Department (if applicable) and Health Department inspections.

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