



MOBILE FOOD FACILITIES (MFF) FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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1. What is a mobile food facility?

A mobile food facility is any vehicle/cart used in conjunction with a commissary or other permanent food facility upon which food is sold or distributed on a retail level (California Retail Food Code, Section 113831).

2. How do I obtain a permit for my mobile food facility?

- Obtain a Mobile Food Facility Application. Applications are available online at smchealth.org/mobile-food or at the Environmental Health Services office located at 2000 Alameda de las Pulgas Suite 100, San Mateo, CA 94403.
- Complete the application and submit it along with the appropriate permit fee and any supplemental materials (e.g. food safety certificate, etc.).
- Mobile Food Trucks/Trailers and occupied MFF must have a California State Housing and Community Development (HCD) Insignia.
- Once our office has received all of the application materials and fees, an appointment for an inspection of the mobile food facility will be arranged.
- During non-renewal season food truck inspections are held at the parking lot of 2000 Alameda de las Pulgas in San Mateo by appointment only.

3. If I am fabricating a MFF, Do I need to submit plans?

Yes.

- “2” set of plans
- “1” set of equipment specification sheets (cut sheets), equipment must be NSF/Commercial grade type approved.
- Food Program Application available at smchealth.org/mobile-food.
- Plan review fee (3 hr. equivalent). Fees available at smchealth.org/ehfees.

4. Is the plan check fee the same as the health permit fee?

No. The plan review fee is a separate fee. Once your MFF passes the final inspection, submit the appropriate MFF forms and follow FAQ #2.

5. How long is my MFF permit valid?

MFF permits are valid from February 1st until January 31st of each calendar year. The cost of a new permit is pro-rated, so that an operator applying for a new permit in August will only pay for the next 6 months, and then the MFF will fall



into the regular permitting cycle during the renewal process in February.

6. Am I able to operate my truck anywhere in San Mateo County with an annual permit?

You may operate anywhere in San Mateo County, as long as you are operating in compliance with local zoning requirements. Contact your local municipality zoning or business licensing department, as each city or unincorporated community may have different regulations. You may also choose to operate under a permitted sponsor at a special event, such as a County Fair, Street Fair, Farmer's Market, or other sponsored event such as "Off-the-Grid". Event-type operations require approval from the event sponsor.

7. Is my San Mateo County MFF Permit valid in other counties? No – each county environmental health department issues their own permits.

8. What is an HCD Insignia?



An HCD insignia is issued by the California State Housing and Community Development Agency, which certifies that an enclosed mobile food facility meets California construction standards. Experienced builders typically ensure that a food truck is HCD certified before handing it over to the buyer.

Please note that your truck must have an HCD insignia prior to being inspected and permitted by San Mateo County Environmental Health Services. If you cannot locate an HCD insignia on your truck, please contact the [California State Housing and Community Development Agency](#).

Contact Manufactured Housing at (916) 445-3338. For a small fee they will research their records to see if the mobile vehicle has ever been issued an insignia. They may provide you with a duplicate insignia.



To request an inspection for a food truck, please contact the HCD Northern California Field Office at (916) 255-2501. Please note that additional information will be required.

Northern Area Office
9342 Tech Center Drive #550
Sacramento, CA 95826
(916) 255-2501
HCD.CA.GOV

9. I bought a used truck – how do I get it permitted?

Follow the steps listed above in FAQ #2. Please note that, regardless of when the truck was originally built and permitted, you will be required to bring it up to current health and safety code standards. For example, an existing 2-compartment ware wash sink will need to be upgraded to a 3-compartment sink with dual integrated drain boards. **Verify that the MFF truck has a valid HCD Insignia.**

10. Do I have to get a permit if I'm only operating at one community event?

If you are only operating at a community event, you can apply for a Temporary Food Facility (TFF) permit. TFF permits are event-specific, so you must obtain a TFF permit for each community event you wish to participate in.

11. Do I need a permit if I'm only operating on private property?

You must have a valid health permit to sell or donate food (including beverages), regardless of whether you are on private or public property.

12. My truck is in the shop – can I use someone else's truck in the meantime?

No - health permits are non-transferrable and are issued based on the VIN (vehicle identification number) and license plate you provided when your annual permit was issued.

13. I sold my MFF but I'm still getting billed for the permit. How do I fix this?

If you no longer wish to operate your MFF, you must submit a *Notification of Sale or Non-Operation of Mobile Food Facility* form that can be found on smchealth.org/foodforms. Once you submit this paperwork, your permit will be inactivated and you will stop receiving bills for your annual permit.



Please note the following:

- If you submit a form stating that you will not be operating your MFF and you change your mind, you will be charged the full annual permit fee when you bring your truck in for inspection.
- If you submit a form stating that you will not be operating your MFF and are found operating, a fee may be assessed of up to three times the cost of the annual permit, plus any associated administrative costs.

14. Can I use a BBQ in conjunction with my MFF?

No - barbecuing is allowed only on the same premises as, in reasonable proximity to, and in conjunction with, a permanent food facility approved for food preparation, a temporary food facility, or a stationary mobile food facility operating at a designated community event (California Retail Food Code, Section 114143).

15. Can I set up extra tables and shelves in conjunction with my MFF?

No - all food that is sold or distributed to the public must be stored on the permitted mobile food facility. Table-top displays are only allowed at a temporary food event, swap meet, or certified farmer's market.

16. Can I use my friend's restaurant as my commissary?

If you are applying to park and service your MFF at a facility that is not currently permitted as a commissary, you must apply for a *Commercial Kitchen/Commissary Evaluation* and pay the associated fee if applicable. An inspector will do an evaluation of the facility to determine if it can support the needs and requirements of your business in addition to the facility's existing needs and requirements. If the inspector determines that the proposed facility can accommodate your business, you will be approved to use this location as your commissary.

17. Do I have to park and service the truck at the same location where I make the food?

No, you can use multiple locations to meet the needs and requirements of your MFF. If you are using multiple locations, you must submit a commissary agreement for each location. Please note that if any of the facilities you are using are outside of San Mateo County, you must have the commissary form(s) signed by the health department that has jurisdiction of the facility.



18. Can I park my MFF at home?

No - all mobile food facilities must be parked or stored at an approved commissary at the end of each operating day and whenever they are not in use.

19. Can I store my MFF at a storage facility?

See FAQ #17. If you wish to store your MFF at a storage facility, or at any other location in San Mateo County that is not currently permitted as a commissary, you must request and pay for a Commercial Kitchen/Commissary Evaluation.

20. I want to operate a concession stand at the county fair. Do I need an MFF permit?

No – you can apply for a Temporary Food Facility permit. The permit you are issued will only allow you to operate your concession stand at the San Mateo County Fair.

21. I want to open a kiosk at the mall – do I need an MFF permit?

Please submit plans so the plan check inspector can determine how to permit your specific business. Visit smchealth.org/food/plancheck for more information.

22. Do I need mechanical refrigeration for my hot dog cart?

You must have mechanical refrigeration if you are holding any items that require temperature control, such as extra hot dogs, diced tomatoes, cheese, etc. Ice chests are no longer acceptable for cold storage of potentially hazardous foods.

23. The truck I bought has a cold plate – can I use that in lieu of mechanical refrigeration?

No – Current health and safety code standards require mechanical refrigeration in all refrigerators.

24. Can I use temporary (i.e. magnetic) signs for my MFF?

No. Signage is required on at least two sides of the exterior of the vehicle and must be permanently affixed. The business name must be at least 3 inches high and of a color contrasting with the vehicle/cart exterior. The address and telephone number of the owner/operator or commissary must be at least 1 inch high and of a color contrasting with the vehicle/cart exterior. All signage must be legible and clearly visible to consumers.



25. If a truck doesn't have a permit and they're selling on my property (ie, Facebook), can I be held liable?

You are not liable for unpermitted trucks and/or carts that show up on your property; however, we do encourage you to contact this department with any concerns you may have about unpermitted food sales. Vendors who are selling food without a health permit are not inspected by this department, which increases the likelihood that your customers and/or employees may get sick from eating the food they are preparing and selling.

26. I just had my truck built and it doesn't have a license plate number yet – can I still get a permit?

No. You must have a license plate to get a permit.

27. I already have a permit for one truck. Do I need a separate permit if I want to operate a second truck with the same menu?

Yes. Every truck is considered a separate business and must have its own inspection and permit fees. The trucks may have the same names followed by a number as the identifier (e.g., Taco Truck #1 & Taco Truck #2).

28. I have an annual permit and want to participate at a community event. Do I need any additional permits or licenses?

Your annual permit allows you to operate at community events. You will not need to obtain any additional permits or licenses.

29. Do I need a permit to sell packaged food or beverages from my cart/vehicle?

Yes. Every person who operates a mobile food facility must have a valid health permit.

30. Who can I contact for more information?

Please see list of contacts below.

Bernardo Patino | bpatino@smcgov.org | (650) 339-0347 | (M-TH)

Environmental Health Services Office | (650) 372-6200 | Ask for the Food supervisor or coverage for MFF