

MOBILE FOOD UNIT

Chickahominy Health District

General Guidance Information

In an effort to better understand the concepts mentioned in this document please reference the following listing of definitions that have been created for this purpose:

_ **“Mobile food unit”** would mean a vehicle-mounted food service establishment designed to be readily movable.

_ **“Pushcart”** would mean a non-self propelled vehicle or stand that is limited to serving non-potentially hazardous foods, commissary prepared or commercially prepared food maintained at proper temperatures, or limited to the preparation and serving of plated, wrapped or packaged frankfurter-like foods.

_ **“Commissary”** means a catering establishment, restaurant, or any other place in which food, food containers or supplies are kept, handled, prepared, packaged or stored for distribution to satellite operations and regulated by the Virginia Department of Health (VDH).

_ **“Packaged”** means bottled, canned, cartoned, securely bagged, or securely wrapped, whether packaged in a food establishment or a food processing plant. (This definition is from the Virginia Food Regulations.)

_ **“Easily cleanable”** means that surfaces are readily accessible and made of such materials and finish, depending upon their usage, so that residue may be effectively removed by normal cleaning methods.

“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. (This definition is from the Virginia Food Regulations, 12 VAC 5-421.)

“Water servicing equipment” shall mean fixtures for the storage and handling of potable water for the unit.

Mobile food units are a type of restaurant. The majority are vehicle-mounted, fully self-contained “kitchens on wheels” that can be driven or pulled to various locations, however, they also include more simple cart operations. They vary in equipment and design, depending upon the type of food and service intended by the operator. They are permitted and inspected as any other restaurant by the Commonwealth of Virginia and are required to meet the same plan review, permitting, construction, food handling and employee requirements as permanent facilities as set forth in the Virginia Food Regulations.

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- There is another type of vehicle-mounted unit that is a vending truck. These mobile units dispense prepackaged sandwiches and other commissary prepared foods, as well as assorted beverages. Because there is no actual food handling these units may not be equipped with onboard dishwashing or handwashing fixtures.
- Pushcarts are not self-propelled, but are pushed, or otherwise transported to their dispensing location. Because these units will be dispensing or vending only commissary prepared foods they will generally only have handwashing fixtures. The exception is that hotdog pushcarts can be used to prepare a frankfurter-like food product.

An operator intending to seek approval for a mobile food unit permit shall be required to complete a plan review process with our department. The cost for the plan review is \$40.00. The following steps are to be followed:

1. Completion of a mobile unit permit application which includes a proposed menu and plans. The cost of the permit application is \$40.00.
2. Plans would include a scale drawing of the interior of the unit showing the location of all major pieces of equipment including handsinks, 3-basin sink, refrigeration units, prep tables, shelving and hot water heater. If company cut-sheet are available that shows the interior of the unit and equipment placement, please include these with the plan review and along with individual equipment specification sheets. If this is an existing unit, include photographs taken from different angles that would give a representative view of the interior of the unit. For existing equipment, information may be obtained from manufacturers by going on line to the company. In cases where a prospective, a local health department may ask an operator to bring the unit to the health department location as part of plan review.
3. Special note: Pushcarts are of a more simple design than traditional mobile units. The drawing will be simple but is required. Photographs or company cut-sheets are extremely valuable in evaluating a pushcart proposal.
4. If cooking is proposed on-board the mobile food unit, include detailed information on the ventilation hood system and fire suppression system. Hoods that are to vent grease laden vapors shall be of commercial-grade construction designed to be cleaned in place or with removable filters. All hoods need to vent to the outside. Vendors must provide written documentation that they have contacted the local Fire Marshall's Office and complied with all local ordinances pertaining to fire suppression systems and use of propane tanks.

5. Include a listing of the materials to be used for constructing the floors, walls and ceiling. The materials proposed must be of smooth, durable construction and easily cleanable.
6. For mobile units, include information regarding screening or other details on protecting the interior from the entrance of flying insects. Include details on the service window(s) design.
7. For all pushcarts, include information regarding the proposed commissary. For all mobile concepts include information regarding the proposed service area location for the unit and where obtain potable water will be obtained.
8. See the attached sections of the Virginia Food Regulations for specific requirements regarding potable water and wastewater holding tanks.
9. At some point prior to permitting, the mobile unit and commissary/service area will be inspected and approved.

10. All other requirements in the Virginia Food Regulations, 12 VAC 5-421, related to the operation of a food establishment will apply. A copy of the regulations can be obtained by visiting the Virginia Department of Health website at www.vdh.virginia.gov and searching “food regulations”. Local county requirements for zoning and fire protection may also apply. Please contact your county zoning and fire marshal’s office for information.

Frequently there is confusion between a Mobile Food Permit and a Temporary Event Permit. An operator possessing a valid **Mobile Food Permit** from a county health department within the Commonwealth of Virginia is able to operate on a daily basis and from place to place. Typically mobile units return to a commissary and/or service area at least one time each day or as need. Self-contained mobile units may not need to return to a commissary daily. This should be discussed in detail with the permitting agency during the plan review process. ***Also, contact the locality in which you wish to operate for any local ordinances and/or zoning requirements that may apply.***

A **Temporary Event Permit** is issued only for a particular pre-approved special event, and the permit will have a short-term expiration date. An operator must apply separately for each temporary event and must qualify for a permit prior to preparing and offering food to the public. *The exception would be a vendor possessing a Mobile Food Permit.*

MOBILE WATER AND WASTE WATER TANKS

12 VAC 5-421-2360. 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;
2. Durable, corrosion resistant, and nonabsorbent; and
3. Finished to have a smooth, easily cleanable surface.

Materials used in the construction of a mobile water tank are affected by the water they contact. Tank liners may deteriorate and flake. Metals or platings can be toxic. To prevent the degradation of the quality of the water, it is important that the materials used in the construction of the tank are suitable for such use.

12 VAC 5-421-2370. 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.

12 VAC 5-421-2380. 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.

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The tank must be a closed system from the filling inlet to the outlet to prevent contamination of water. It is important that the bottom of the tank be sloped to the outlet to allow the tank to drain completely, to facilitate the proper cleaning and disinfection of the tank, and to prevent the retention of water or solutions after cleaning.

Some tanks are designed with an access opening to facilitate the cleaning and servicing of the water tank. The access must be constructed to prevent the opening from becoming a source of contamination of the water.

12 VAC 5-421-2390. "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.

V-type threads are difficult to clean if contaminated with food or waste. To prevent the contamination of the drinking water, this type of thread should only be used on water tank inlets and outlets if the connection is permanent which eliminates exposed, difficult-to-clean threads.

12 VAC 5-421-2400. 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.

Water tanks are equipped with a vent to preclude distortion during filling or draining. The vent should be equipped with a suitable screen or filter to protect the tank against the entry of insects or other vermin that may contaminate the water supply.

12 VAC 5-421-2410. 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.

Both the inlet and outlet must be sloped to drain to prevent the pooling of possibly contaminated water or sanitizing solution.

12 VAC 5-421-2420. Hose, construction and identification.

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

1. Safe;
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.

Hoses used to fill potable water tanks should be dedicated for that one task and should be identified for that use only to prevent contaminating the water. Hoses must be made of a material that will not leach detrimental substances into the water.

12 VAC 5-421-2430. Filter, compressed air.

A filter that does not pass oil or oil vapors shall be installed in the air supply line between the compressor and drinking water system when compressed air is used to pressurize the water tank system.

Compressor pistons are lubricated with oil to minimize wear. Some of the oil is carried into the air lines and if not intercepted may contaminate the tank and water lines.

12 VAC 5-421-2440. 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.

Protective equipment provided for openings of the water supply must be in use to prevent contamination which may be present where the supply is exposed to the environment, i.e., at water inlets or outlets or the ends of transfer hoses.

12 VAC 5-421-2450. 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.

Mobile units may be particularly vulnerable to environmental contamination if soiled hose connections are coupled to the tank inlet.

12 VAC 5-421-2460. 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.

Contaminants of various types may be introduced into a water system during construction or repair or other incidents. The system must be flushed and sanitized after maintenance and before it is placed into service to prevent contamination of the water introduced into the tank.

12 VAC 5-421-2470. 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.

When a water system includes a pump, or a pump is used in filling a water tank, care must be taken during hookup to prevent negative pressure on the supplying water system.

Backflow prevention to protect the water supply is especially necessary during cleaning and sanitizing operations on a mobile system.

12 VAC 5-421-2480. 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 12 VAC 5-421-2440.

When not connected for use, water inlets, outlets, and hose fittings should be closed to the environment. Unless capped or otherwise protected, filling inlets, outlets, and hoses may become contaminated by dust or vermin.

12 VAC 5-421-2490. 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.

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.

12 VAC 5-421-2540. Conveying sewage.*

Sewage shall be conveyed to the point of disposal through an approved sanitary sewage system or other system, including use of sewage transport vehicles, waste retention tanks, pumps, pipes, hoses, and connections that are constructed, maintained, and operated according to law.

12 VAC 5-421-2550. Removing mobile food establishment wastes.

Sewage and other liquid wastes shall be removed from a mobile food establishment at an approved waste servicing area or by a sewage transport vehicle in such a way that a public health hazard or nuisance is not created.

Improper disposal of waste provides a potential for contamination of food, utensils, and equipment and, therefore, may cause serious illness or disease outbreaks. Proper removal is required to prevent contamination of ground surfaces and water supplies, or creation of other insanitary conditions that may attract insects and other vermin.

12 VAC 5-421-2560. Flushing a waste retention tank.

A tank for liquid waste retention shall be thoroughly flushed and drained in a sanitary manner during the servicing operation.

Thoroughly flushing the liquid waste retention tank will prevent the buildup of deposits within the tank which could affect the proper operation of the tank.

12 VAC 5-421-2570. Approved sewage disposal system.*

Sewage shall be disposed through an approved facility that is:

1. A public sewage treatment plant; or
2. An individual sewage disposal system that is sized, constructed, maintained, and operated according to law.

*Many diseases can be transmitted from one person to another through fecal contamination of food and water. This transmission can be indirect. Proper disposal of human wastes greatly reduces the risk of fecal contamination. This Code provision is intended to ensure that wastes will not contaminate ground surfaces or water supplies; pollute surface waters; be accessible to children or pets; or allow rodents or insects to serve as vectors of disease from this source. Hoses, pumps, and tanks used for food or water may not be used for other liquids because **this** may contaminate the water supply. If a hose, tank, or pump has been used to transfer liquid food, the equipment must be cleaned and sanitized before using it for water delivery. Failure to properly clean and sanitize the equipment would introduce nutrients, and possibly bacteria, into the water as well as inactivate residual chlorine from public water supplies.*

12 VAC 5-421-2500. 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.

All other requirements in the Virginia Food Regulations, 12 VAC 5-421, related to the operation of a food establishment will apply. A copy of the regulations can be obtained by visiting the Virginia Department of Health website at www.vdh.virginia.gov and searching “food regulations”.

Local county requirements for zoning and fire protection may also apply. Please contact your county zoning and fire marshall’s office for information.