



Northeast Tri County Health District Environmental Health Division

Plan Review Guidelines for Food Establishments

Important: To avoid unnecessary costs and delays, do not start construction until you receive an approval letter from Northeast Tri County Health District.

Introduction - Opening a New Food Establishment

Congratulations on your decision to open a new food establishment! Following the steps outlined below will help you meet Northeast Tri County Health District requirements to build or remodel a food establishment. The steps outlined within this guide are not all inclusive and additional information may be required.

Before You Get Started

Considerations in developing a food establishment include:

- Food establishments that prepare food for the public cannot be located in a private residence and no portion of its operation can be conducted in a private residence.
- Drinking water must be obtained from an approved source that is a public water system. (WAC 246-215 05100)
- Connection to a public sewer system or an approved on-site sewage system specifically designed for the food establishment is required. (246-215 05435)
- All construction must conform to the requirements of Chapter 246-215 WAC.

Check with Other Agencies

Check with other agencies to make sure your location and/or building can be approved for a commercial food establishment. Other agencies may include but not limited to:

- County or City Planning Department
- County or City Building Department
- County or City Fire Marshal
- If servicing alcoholic beverages, Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board
- L&I if opening a new food truck, trailer, or other mobile unit
- Washington State Business Licensing

Step 1: Start the Plan Review Process

Washington State food safety regulations require all new or remodeled food establishments have a plan review completed by the applicable public health jurisdiction. Often, changes must be made to your plans, equipment, or materials based on food safety requirements.

The plan review process may take up to 14 business days to complete. The review does not begin until all necessary items listed below have been received by the Health District.

You must submit the following to begin the plan review process:

- Food Establishment Plan Review Application.
- Payment of the plan review fee. The initial plan review fee covers up to one hour of review time.
- Submit the Application for Food Service Operating Permit at the Health District at least thirty days before the date planned for opening. (246-215-08310)

- Submit floor plans, preferably to scale.
- Submit the plumbing schedule (included in packet).
- Submit the finish schedule (included in packet).
- Submit specification sheets for all equipment (sinks, refrigerators, hoods, grills, lighting units, hot water heater, etc.) See example.
- Menu

Step 2: Approval Letter

Once your plans have been approved, the Health District will send you an official approval letter. When you receive the approval letter, you may begin purchasing your equipment and building your establishment, pending all other applicable agency approvals.

If the plans are not approved, NETCHD staff will provide a written letter explaining the reason(s) for the denial. If additional information is needed to complete the review, a list of required information will be provided.

Step 3: Pre-Opening Inspection

Once construction is complete, a pre-opening inspection must be scheduled with the Health District. *If a walk through is requested prior to the official pre-opening inspection, an hourly rate will apply according to the Health District's updated fee schedule.* A food establishment shall not open to the public until a final approval is obtained from all applicable agencies. This inspection ensures that the facility has been constructed in accordance with the approved plans. The pre-opening inspection will need to be scheduled at a minimum of 7 business days prior to the planned opening date to provide time for corrections and re-inspection if required. To schedule a pre-opening inspection:

- Pay the fees for the pre-opening inspection and the operating permit.
- Schedule a time to conduct the pre-opening inspection with the Environmental Health Specialist that completed the plan review.

Preparing for the Pre-opening Inspection

- Remove all construction debris.
- Stock all handwashing sinks with soap, means for hand drying, and a garbage receptacle.
- Ensure that all sinks have hot and cold running water. Hand washing sinks need water of at least 100°F.
- Clean and sanitize all food contact surfaces and non-food contact surfaces.
- Clean and sanitize ice machines.
- Place calibrated thermometers in all refrigerators.
- Make sure all cold holding and hot holding units are operating properly. Turn on cold holding units 24 hours in advance of the pre-opening inspection.

Tip: place a cup of water in cold holding and hot holding equipment. This will be used to check holding temperatures of the unit. All cold holding equipment must be able to maintain a temperature of 41°F or less. Hot holding equipment must keep foods at 135°F or greater.

Step 4: Approval to Operate

Once the Environmental Health Specialist ensures that your facility was constructed according to the approved plans and all equipment is operating properly, your establishment may be approved to open. Post your food establishment permit in a location visible to your customers. Again, you need to make sure you have approval from other applicable agencies before opening to the public.

Step 5: Operating your Establishment to Serve Safe Food—Always!

Person in Charge (PIC): At least one person in charge is necessary on-site per shift. This designated PIC must:

- Demonstrate food safety knowledge
- Know when to exclude or restrict ill food workers
- Ensure all food workers follow the food safety regulations according to the Washington Administrative Code Chapter 246-215

Employee Training

The number one food safety tool is a properly trained food worker. All employees need to be trained to handle foods properly, to operate equipment in a safe manner, and to ask questions when they have them.

Food safety rules and handouts that reinforce food safety information are available from your Environmental Health Specialist. Many are also available at www.netchd.org.

Food Worker Cards

- All food workers must have a valid Washington state food worker card within 14 days of hire, however, food workers should have food worker cards before employment. If a new employee comes to work without a valid food worker card, then food safety training must be provided and documented by the employer before the food worker handles any food.
- The permit holder must make sure that food worker cards (or copies) for all staff are available during an inspection.

Employee Health Policy

Each food establishment should establish a written employee health policy and have a copy of this policy on-site. The policy shall be followed to ensure that ill food workers do not report to work, or that restricted employees do not work with food or contaminate food contact surfaces. (WAC Chapter 246-215 02200)

Inspections

Inspections are conducted to help food establishments be successful. This is done by educating food workers, answering questions, and making corrections to processes that do not follow the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) and could lead to food borne illness.

Following the pre-opening inspection, the first unannounced routine inspection will occur approximately within the first month of operation. Routine inspections are conducted 1-3 times per year depending on the permit classification assigned to your facility. Your inspector will review the inspection report with you. Establishments with multiple violations may also have follow-up inspections and incur a fee to cover the cost of the additional inspection. The Health District also conducts additional inspections when complaints or reports of foodborne illness are received. Inspection reports are public record and can be viewed on the Health District's website.

Change of Ownership

If the ownership of a food establishment changes, it is the responsibility of the new owner to inform the Northeast Tri County Health District that they have presumed responsibility of the establishment. The new owner is required to complete a Change of Ownership form to provide all necessary contact information.

Annual Renewal of the Operating Permit

A notice will be mailed to the food establishment's point of contact when the annual operating permit is due for renewal. It is important to pay for the annual permit promptly in order to continue operating as normal. If the mailing address or phone number changes for the point of contact, please notify the Health District immediately to prevent interruption of important communications.

Contacting the Health District

Please call the Northeast Tri County Health District any time you have questions, (509) 684-2262 (option #2).

The food establishment owner or designee is **required** to contact the Health District if:

- You have received notification of a foodborne illness from your establishment. Your inspector will work with you to determine the cause and provide suggestions and guidance.
- An imminent health hazard exists such as a fire, flood, lack of power, interruption of water supply, or sewage backup.
- An employee reports a confirmed illness of Hep. A, Salmonella Typhi, Shigella, or E. Coli.

Other Helpful Hints

- All equipment needs to be easily cleanable and in good repair. Any wood within the food preparation areas will need to be non-absorbent, sealed, smooth and easily cleanable.
- Soda fountains are to have reduced pressure backflow prevention devices installed on the waterline to the carbonator.
- Food preparation sinks, ice makers, ice bins, dipper wells, dishwashing equipment need to be indirectly drained.
- If the establishment is connected to a public sewer system, contact the building department regarding the possible requirement for a grease trap. If the establishment is connected to an on-site sewage system and generates grease-laden wastewater, a grease trap is required.
- A three-compartment sink is the minimal requirement for dishwashing. A mechanical dishwasher is optional but must be an approved commercial unit. Three compartment sinks need to be large enough to accommodate the largest piece of equipment to be washed.
- Exhaust hoods, if required by the building department or fire marshal, are to be designed to prevent grease and condensation from collecting on walls and ceilings.
- At least one mop sink with a floor drain must be provided and located in an area where contamination of foods cannot take place.
- Toxic chemicals and cleaning supplies need to be stored in an area separate from food storage area.
- Lighting units need to be covered with shielding or contain shatterproof bulbs.
- Doors to the exterior and restroom doors need to have a self-closing mechanism installed.
- Bathroom facilities must be provided for patron use if there is customer seating. Customers are not allowed to pass through the kitchen or any preparation areas in order to access the restroom.