

General Information on Starting a Food Service Business in Elmore County

These guidelines contain general information for individuals considering building, remodeling, or equipping a food service business. This information is basic and does not satisfy all the rules of the State Board of Health in Alabama for such businesses. It is illegal to operate a food service establishment without obtaining a food permit from the County Health Department. It is also illegal to operate a food service establishment from private living quarters.

Operations from a location that is or was previously permitted as a food service establishment can be initiated by contacting the Elmore County Health Department. An inspector will then provide the specific information needed to proceed with the permitting process.

Operations from a site to be built or from a location that has never been a permitted food service establishment must be preceded by the submission of plans. Plan review will protect you from buying equipment or installing an item that does not meet health department requirements. It is easy to correct problems on paper but can be very expensive to correct problems after construction and installation. See **Documents Required for Food and Lodging Plan Review** for further information.

Plumbing and Water Supply

- All plumbing must be installed in accordance with applicable codes and standards.
- Each hose connection must be protected by a backflow preventer (vacuum breaker).
- The hot water supply must be sufficient for intended operations (check water heater size).
- Tempered water from hot and cold water sources must be provided through mixing valve faucets.
- Provide indirect drains for all equipment requiring drainage (ice machine, dishwashers, etc.).
- Water supply must be from a health department approved source.

Sewage Disposal

- All sewage, including used grease, mop water, condensation drainage, and other waste water must be disposed of into sanitary sewer systems or a health department approved septic tank system (onsite sewage disposal system).
- No waste water or sewage shall be deposited onto the ground or to any area accessible to insects or vermin.

- A grease trap may be required check with city officials if you are in the city limits concerning the city's requirements. If the facility is on a septic system the system must be designed by an **engineer**. If this is an existing building with a septic system an **engineer** must still determine if the system is adequate for the establishment you are planning. Additional field line, a grease trap and additional septic tanks maybe necessary, depending on the engineers estimated water usage for your establishment.

Construction

The following finish schedules apply to all food and utensil handling areas, food storage areas, and restrooms:

Floors

- The floors must be constructed of durable, smooth, easily cleanable material such as sealed concrete, quarry tile, terrazzo or ceramic tile, or a commercial grade of vinyl tile.
- If flood cleaning (water flushing/hose down) is to be used, the floor must be constructed of a masonry or tile material, graded to a 3 inch minimum floor drain and coved and sealed at the floor-wall juncture. Exposed horizontal utility lines and pipes on the floor are prohibited.

Walls and Ceilings

- The walls and ceilings must be constructed of a smooth, durable, non-permeable material finished in a light color. Approved materials include, fiberglass reinforced panels (FRP) or painted sheetrock.
- All paints used must be washable.
- There should be no exposed studs, joists or rafters, and no exposed utility service lines or pipes except.
- No bare wood and no contact paper (including shelves) is allowed.

Doors

- All doors leading to the outside and those at the restrooms shall be tight fitting and equipped with self-closing mechanisms. Frames are to be smooth, durable, and sealed.

Restrooms

- Restrooms must comply with the above floors, walls, and ceiling finish and door schedules.
- Restroom doors, as well as vestibule doors if provided, must be self-closing. The toilets must be provided with mechanical ventilation (exhaust fan) to the outside.
- The ladies' restroom must be provided with a trash can with a lid.
- The number of toilets required and the number and placement of fixtures therein will be determined by the applicable plumbing codes.

Garbage

- Garbage must be stored in durable, easily cleanable, insect and rodent proof containers. The number and size of these containers must be sufficient to store all refuse generated between scheduled pick-ups. Containers and their storage area must be cleaned frequently enough to prevent insect and rodent attraction.
- If cans are used, a can wash must be provided either inside the establishment or in an enclosed area protected from rainwater if it is located outside. If a garbage dumpster/compactor is used, it should be located on a hard, non-absorbent surface. If the dumpster/compactor is drained to the sanitary sewer, it must be located in an enclosed area protected from rainwater. If the dumpster is not enclosed you must contract with the dumpster company for cleaning off site.

Lighting

- At least fifty foot-candles of light must be provided at all food preparation and utensil handling areas.
- At least twenty foot-candles of light in all other areas.
- The lights in food handling, food storage, and equipment cleaning/storage areas are to be shielded.

Ventilation

- All rooms, including storage rooms, are to have sufficient ventilation to keep them free of excessive heat, steam, obnoxious odors, smoke, and fumes.
- If greasy fumes or a water condensate problem are inherent in the cooking operation, the cooking equipment must be installed under a ventilation hood, with removable filters, power-vented to the outside. If a water condensate problem will be created with a mechanical dishwasher, it must be vented to the outside.
- Pipes and conduits must be concealed within the hood structure except vertical pipes for fire extinguisher nozzles. The hood, its installation and its suppression system must be approved by the local building and fire officials.

Lockers and Dressing Rooms

- Enough lockers or suitable facilities to store employee clothing and personal belongings must be provided in designated areas that are separate from all food preparation and storage.

Storage

- Provide enough dry storage area for the intended operation. Only approved storage cabinets or shelving will be allowed.

Premises

- The exterior area surfaces used for walking, driving, and parking must be surfaced with concrete, asphalt, gravel, or similar materials effectively treated to minimize dust.
- These surfaces must be graded to prevent water pooling.
- Vegetation must be kept under control.

Equipment

Cold Food Holding

- Provide refrigeration adequate for the intended operation; capable of maintaining a product temperature of about 41°F or below. The maximum food temperature allowed is 45°F.
- Refrigerators should be commercial-type with an air-flow fan. Freezers must be capable of maintaining food frozen and should hold the product at an air temperature of 0°F or below.
- Each cooler/freezer must have a conspicuous thermometer for periodic (at least daily) temperature checks.

Hot Food Holding

- If food is intended to be held hot for an extended period of time, then the hot holding equipment must be capable of maintaining a product temperature of 135°F or above.

Equipment Design and Installation

- All equipment must be approved commercial equipment designed for its appropriate function (NSF - National Sanitation Foundation -approved is recommended). Home type equipment and appliances are generally not approved for commercial operations.
- Each piece of equipment that is not sealed to surrounding surfaces must have enough space allowed to provide for easy cleaning underneath, on all sides, and on top. (Generally six inches from the floor for floor-mounted equipment and four inches from the countertop for countertop-mounted equipment).
- Equipment that can be easily lifted by one person or on wheels and not bound by utility connections is exempt from this requirement.
- Equipment must not be designed or installed so that unreachable or uncleanable cracks and crevices are created.

Sinks

- A three compartment sink, adequate size for the intended operation, commercial type with drainboards (so that utensils, pots, pans, etc. can be air-dried) must be provided. Hot and cold water tempered through a mixing valve must be provided to all sink compartments.
- Sanitation capabilities must be provided. Approved chemical sanitizers include chlorine bleach, quaternary ammonia and iodine. Appropriate test strips must be provided to test sanitizer concentrations.
- Hand sinks must be provided in or immediately adjacent to all restrooms must be convenient to each work area. This sink is to be used for handwashing only.
- An approved can wash area must be provided.

Menu

- A list of all foods prepared or served must be provided.

Other Agencies

Other agencies that should be contacted **before** construction begins or any lease is signed:

- Local Fire Department
- Local Building and Plumbing Inspector
- State Building Commission - (334)242-4082
- Your insurance company
- The Alabama Development Office, Small Business Advocate - (334) 242-0485 or (800) 248-0033. This office provides assistance and guidance on starting small businesses.

For further information, please contact:

**Elmore County Health Department
Environmental Division
6501 US Highway 231
Wetumpka, AL 36092
(334) 567-1171 office; (334) 514-5832 fax**

A copy of Alabama's Rules for Food Establishment Sanitation can be obtained at no charge by contacting:

**Food & Lodging Branch
RSA Tower, Suite 1250
Montgomery, AL 36130
334-206-5375**