

TEMPORARY FOOD BOOTHS: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
NAVAJO COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE DISTRICT

The Navajo County Public Health Service District regulates food service establishments based on the State of Arizona Food & Drink Regulations. The regulations are Arizona State laws that are enforced through your local Environmental Health department. The current set of regulations went into effect in October 2001.

Some of the new laws regulate the selling and vending of food for temporary events such as fairs, carnivals, and annual holiday parades and gatherings.

Can I make food in my home to sell? Foods that are considered “Potentially Hazardous Foods,” those that can cause a foodborne illness and/or death if mishandled, are NOT allowed to be produced in the home kitchen and then sold at temporary food booths. This would include most protein-based foods such as meat, poultry, eggs, and fish. Home canned foods are also not allowed. An exception is made for non-potentially hazardous foods such as pies, cookies, and cakes that would be offered for sale at a fundraiser bake sale. The distinction is made based on the relative risk to the consumer. A meat item can be easily mishandled and allow for the growth of disease-causing germs whereas baked goods are generally safe after going through a sterilizing heat process during baking. Here’s how this distinction is worded in the State law describing what is considered an approved operation under part (iv) of the definition: A “Food Establishment” does not include a kitchen in a private home if only food that is not potentially hazardous is prepared for sale or service at a function such as a religious or charitable organization’s bake sale if allowed by law and if the consumer is informed by a clearly visible placard at the sales or service location that the food is prepared in a kitchen that is not subject to regulation and inspection by the regulatory authority.”

Most private kitchens do not have the refrigerator capacity to handle bulk production of food and most do not have a hand wash sink in the kitchen. The public health inspector does not visit and inspect the private home so there is no assurance that the food has been handled in a safe and sanitary fashion.

We’ve been doing this for fifty years. Why is it now against the law?

This has been against the law for many years and in many situations was never fully enforced. The other reason is that there are many new dangers showing up in our food supply. Something as simple as mishandling ground beef can kill if the beef is contaminated with E.coli O157:H7; undercooking a hot dog can cause a pregnant woman to lose her child if the hot dog is contaminated with listeria. Many of these dangers were not even of concern a few years ago. But they are now. Realize that up to 5,000 people per year die in the US as a result of

mishandled food. Many people who want to do a food booth do not appreciate the degree of danger involved.

If we can't fix food in the private home, how are we supposed to fix it?

Food can be prepared on-site during the event. This allows both the eating public and the health inspector to observe the sanitary conditions (or lack of) being used to prepare the food. The other method is to prepare food in a kitchen that has been regulated and passed by the Health Department. Examples include a licensed restaurant, a licensed school, or a licensed church kitchen. Both options require safe food handling procedures. Potentially hazardous foods prepared on-site require proper cooling, cooking, and hot holding; foods prepared in a licensed kitchen and transported to an event have to be kept hot (or cold) during transport.

What are the requirements to operate a Temporary Food Booth?

The answer to this question depends upon the type of food being handled. Someone doing kettle corn has less concern than someone doing a full service meal. Here are some of the minimal requirements:

- A five-gallon container with hot water and spigot that can function as an emergency hand wash station including a waste water receptacle, paper towels, and liquid hand soap.
- Approved physical location. A three-sided tent may be necessary during bad weather to protect the food.
- Ice and ice chests to hold raw meats, etc.
- Plastic gloves, serving spoons, and approved utensils
- Bleach and chlorine test strips for a sanitizer solution for wiping cloths and utensil washing.
- Garbage can and lid to keep trash under control.
- A metal-stem product thermometer to check food temperatures.
- Three food-grade quality tubs to establish a "Wash-Rinse-Sanitize" dishwashing procedure.

Please contact your local Health Department office in Holbrook (928) 524-4750 or Showlow (928) 532-6050 for additional information and to obtain a Permit Application. Your Environmental Health Sanitarians will be glad to work with you to continue the Navajo County traditions in a safe and sanitary manner.