



Harris County Public Health

Building a Healthy Community

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FOOD ESTABLISHMENT PLAN APPROVAL PROCEDURES

INTRODUCTION:

The Rules for the Regulation of Food Establishments in Harris County state that before a food service establishment is constructed, extensively remodeled, or an existing structure is converted to be used as a food service establishment, the applicant shall pay a new facility inspection fee and submit plans and specifications to the Harris County Public Health, Environmental Public Health Division (EPH) for review and approval before construction, remodeling or conversion begins. The review and approval of plans and specifications shall be made in coordination with the Harris County Engineer.

The plan approval process is an important part of EPH's Food Safety Program. This process allows EPH to evaluate the proposed food establishment's menu, equipment, and facilities to identify potential food safety hazards prior to construction and operation of the food establishment. Avoidance of these hazards is key to ensuring that the food establishment has the capability to prevent foodborne illness provide safe food to the citizens of Harris County.

NOTE

- * Food service and retail food establishments are any establishments, which prepare, process, store, serve or sell food and/ or drink directly to a consumer.
- * In addition to submitting plans to the Environmental Public Health Division (EPH), all food establishments to be located within incorporated cities under the Health Department's jurisdiction must comply with the guidelines set forth by these cities. These cities may also require separate permits and plan approval.

The following procedures are intended to explain what is required before plans are approved and the Harris County Public Health (HCPH) Environmental Public Health Division (EPH) issues an application for a Food Permit.

REVIEW PROCEDURES

The plan review fee, the completed application for food establishment, and electronic copies of the menu and food establishment plans in PDF format must be submitted to EPH before the review process can begin. Plans will be reviewed to determine compliance with the Texas Food Establishment Rules and the Harris County Permit Order.

Construction or remodeling may begin after approval is granted through the review process.

DOCUMENTS TO BE SUBMITTED:

1. Certificate of Compliance – For establishments in unincorporated Harris County, this certificate is issued by the County Engineer indicating Construction or Substantial Improvement is in compliance with the Harris County Fire Code as of a specific date and for a specific occupancy. The certificate may be filed in the Real Property Records as outlined in Section 107.1 of the code. A Certificate of Compliance under this Fire Code shall not be construed as authorizing the owner or operator of any building to afterward operate or maintain such building in such a way as to create, cause or allow the existence of a fire or life safety condition, which condition shall be subject to the independent enforcement authority of the County Fire Marshal.
2. Certified Food Manager – A minimum of one employee must have a valid Food Manager Certification during all hours of operation of the food establishment. This certification will be verified during the pre-opening inspection. The permit application and operation of the establishment will be delayed if this requirement is not met. Only establishments that handle prepackaged food and do not prepare or package food are exempted from the requirement.

The following additional documents may be required if they apply to a specific establishment:

3. Water Utility Agreement – If water and/or sewer service to a specific establishment is provided by a utility district, a water utility agreement must be signed by the district and submitted to EPH before a pre-opening inspection can be conducted. Therefore, the need to obtain a septic system permit or a water system survey is eliminated.
4. Individual Septic System Permit – The Harris County Engineer’s office will review all plans for new construction where sewer service is provided by an individual sewage disposal system. The County Engineer will also review plans for existing systems where there is a proposed increase of 25% or more in the flow or a 50% or more increase in the capacity of the sub-surface drainage field. A professional engineer or a registered sanitarian must survey existing individual sewage disposal systems, which have never been permitted by the Harris County Engineer. When an establishment which is on a septic system changes ownership, the County Engineer’s office must be notified.
5. Individual Water System Survey – Plans for new and existing water supply system (wells), which will serve as public water systems (PWS) will be reviewed by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), Plans Review Section, Austin. However, EPH will make the initial inspection for both new and existing systems. Please contact Harris County EPH at 713-274-6300 for required documentation.
6. Certificate of Occupancy – Establishments under the jurisdiction of an incorporated city that has a contract with EPH to conduct inspections will be required to submit approvals from their local regulatory officials.

PRE-OPENING INSPECTION:

A request must be made to EPH for a pre-opening inspection after completion of construction or remodeling **and** all required documentation has been submitted. Request must be made ten (10) days prior to the desired pre-opening inspection date. The establishment may begin operation after completion of pre-opening inspection and HCPH permit is purchased. A re-inspection fee will be charged if an establishment does not meet requirements to obtain a permit application during the pre-opening inspection.

Questions?

If you have any questions please contact the appropriate agency according to the subject matter previously discussed.

**Environmental Public Health Division
Harris County Public Health**

M-F, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (**no payments or applications taken after 3:30 p.m.**)

(713) 274-6300 (Secretaries)

(713) 274-6375 Fax

E-mail: planreview@hcphe.org

Plans are reviewed by appointment only

HARRIS COUNTY INFRASTRUCTURE DEPT. (for building permits)

10000 Northwest Freeway, Suite 102

Houston, Texas 77092-8615

(713) 956-3000, M-F, 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

TEXAS COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Water Utility Division Plan Review Section

P.O. Box 13087

Austin, Texas 78711-3087

(512) 908-6103

HARRIS COUNTY FIRE CODE QUESTIONS

(713) 956-3000 (ask for fire code review)

REQUIREMENTS FOR FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS

SUBMISSION OF PLANS: The plan review fee, the completed application for food establishment, and an electronic copy of the menu and food establishment plans in PDF format must be submitted to EPH before the review process can begin. Plans and specifications shall indicate the proposed layout, arrangements, mechanical plans and construction materials of work areas, and the type and mode of proposed fixed equipment and facilities.

FLOORS: The floors of all food preparation, food storage, and utensil washing areas, dressing rooms and vestibules shall be constructed of smooth, durable materials. Floor drains shall be provided in floors that are water flushed for cleaning, or in areas where pressure spray methods of cleaning equipment are used. Such floors shall be constructed only of sealed concrete, terrazzo, ceramic tile or similar materials and shall be graded to drain. In all new or remodeled establishments where water flush cleaning methods are used, the junctions between walls and floors shall be covered and sealed. In all new or remodeled establishments, installation of exposed utility lines and pipes on the floor is prohibited.

WALLS AND CEILINGS: The walls and ceilings of food preparation areas, food storage areas, equipment and utensil washing areas, toilet rooms and vestibules shall be light colored, smooth, non-absorbent and easily cleanable. Studs, joists and rafters shall not be exposed in those areas listed above. Utility service lines and pipes shall not be exposed on walls or ceilings in those areas listed above.

TOILETS: Toilet facilities shall be conveniently located and shall be accessible to employees at all times. Toilet rooms be completely enclosed and shall have tight fitting, self closing, solid doors.

LAVATORIES: Lavatories shall be located to permit convenient use by all employees in food preparation areas and utensil washing areas. Lavatories shall be accessible to employees at all times. Lavatories shall also be located in toilet rooms or vestibules. Each lavatory shall be provided with hot and cold water tempered by means of mixing valve or combination faucet.

CLEANING AND SANITIZATION: A three compartment sink shall be used if washing, rinsing, and sanitation of equipment or utensils is done manually. A two compartment sink will be acceptable where only single service tableware is used. Sinks shall be large enough to permit the complete immersion of the utensils and equipment. Drain boards of adequate size shall be provided. Cleaning and sanitization may be done by spray type or immersion dishwashing machines. Drain boards shall be provided and be of adequate size.

PLUMBING: The potable (drinking) water system shall be installed to preclude the possibility of backflow. A hose shall not be attached to a faucet unless a backflow prevention device is installed. Grease traps, if used, shall be located to be easily accessible for cleaning and if in a water district's jurisdiction, the district operator shall approve the installation.

POTABLE (DRINKING) WATER SUPPLY: Every food establishment must have an acceptable potable water supply. Most establishments will be supplied potable water by a Municipal Utility District. Establishments with their own water well must have the well inspected and approved by the Harris County Environmental Public Health Division.

DRESSING ROOMS AND LOCKER AREAS: If employees routinely change clothes within the establishment, rooms shall be designated and used for that purpose. There designated rooms shall be used for food preparation, storage, or service, or for utensil washing or storage. Enough lockers or other suitable facilities shall be provided and used for the storage of employees' clothing and belongings. Lockers may be located in food storage rooms containing only completely packaged food or packaged single service articles.

EQUIPMENT: Equipment shall be located in a way that facilitates cleaning the establishment and prevents food contamination. Floor mounted equipment, unless readily movable, shall be: sealed to the floor; or installed on a raised platform of concrete; or elevated on legs to provide at least a six inch clearance between floor and equipment. Unless sufficient space is provided for easy cleaning between and behind each unit of floor mounted equipment, the space between it and adjoining equipment units and between it and adjacent walls shall be closed or, if exposed to seepage, the equipment shall be sealed to the adjoining equipment or adjacent walls. Aisles and working spaces between units of equipment and walls shall be unobstructed and of sufficient width to permit employees to perform their duties readily without contamination of food or food contact surfaces by clothing or personal contact.

UTILITY FACILITIES: In new or remodeled establishments at least one utility sink (mop sink) or curbed cleaning facility with a floor drain shall be provided and used for the cleaning of mops or similar wet floor cleaning tools.

VENTILATION: All rooms should have sufficient ventilation to keep them free of excessive heat, odors, smoke, and fumes. In all new or remodeled establishments, all rooms from which obnoxious odors, vapors or fumes originate shall be mechanically vented to the outside. When such ventilation may result in the deposition of particular matter or liquids within the ventilation system, ventilation hoods and ventilation equipment shall be equipped with effective, easily removable easily cleanable filters.

LIGHTING: At least 50 foot-candles of light shall be provided at all working surfaces and at least 30 foot-candles shall be provided to the surfaces and equipment in food preparation, utensil washing and hand washing areas, and in toilet rooms. At least 20 foot-candles at a distance of 30 inches from the floor shall be provided in all other areas. Protective shielding shall be provided for all artificial lighting fixtures located over, by or within food storage, preparation, service and display facilities and facilities where utensils and equipment are cleaned and stored.

GARBAGE: Garbage and refuse containers, dumpsters and compactor systems shall be stored on or above a smooth surface of nonabsorbent materials, such as concrete or machine laid asphalt.

LAUNDRY FACILITIES: Laundry facilities, if provided shall be restricted to washing and drying of items necessary to the operation. If a washer is provided, then a dryer must also be provided. Separate rooms shall be provided for laundry facilities.

INSECT AND RODENT CONTROL: Openings to the outside shall be effectively protected against the entrance of insects by tight-fitting, self-closing doors, closed windows, screening, controlled air currents or other means. Screen doors shall be self-closing.

POISONOUS OR TOXIC MATERIALS: Each of the three categories of poisonous or toxic materials shall be stored and located to be physically separate from each other. All poisonous or toxic materials shall be stored in cabinets or in similar physically separated compartments or facilities used for no other purpose. To preclude potential contamination, poisonous or toxic materials shall not be stored above food, food equipment, utensils or single service articles.

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT HARRIS COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH
AT (713) 274-6300 or planreview@hcphes.org**