

STARTING A FOOD BUSINESS

in the City of Cincinnati - *updated 3/2023*



Thank you for your interest in opening a food business in the City of Cincinnati. This guide contains information that will help you navigate the Cincinnati Health Department (CHD) Food Facility Review and Food Licensing process.

Though the food license is a very important part of opening your food business, there may be other departments you will need to contact. Please plan well and give yourself plenty of time to complete all the necessary steps with the pertinent departments. See the list below for departments in the city and state that *may* need to be involved in getting your business up and running.

OFFICE	SERVICE	PHONE NUMBER
CHD - Food Safety Program	Inspections and Plan Review	513-564-1751
City of Cincinnati Building Inspections	General Info	513-352-3271, option 9
Metropolitan Sewer District (MSD)	Sewer Use and Grease Trap Questions	513-557-7000
Ohio Dept of Commerce/Division of Liquor Control	Liquor License	614- 644-2360 https://com/ohio/gov/liqr/
Ohio Department of Taxation	Vendor's License - Apply Online	http://business.ohio.gov
	Tax ID# (EIN)	www.irs.com
Ohio Department of Agriculture	Licenses wholesale operations and home bakeries	614-728-6250 https://agri.ohio.gov

Where do I begin?

Nearly every new or significantly altered facility serving or selling food or beverages in Cincinnati must undergo a Food Facility Review (FFR) by CHD before a license can be issued. An environmental health specialist in our Food Safety Program will review the FFR in order to ensure that the equipment, facilities and design will be suitable for the food items served or sold at the facility.

This guide will help you to determine when you need to submit a Food Facility Review, who you need to get in contact with, and what to expect as far as process and timeline.

PLANNING AHEAD

What is required in my facility?

There are some requirements common to all licensed food service operations and retail food establishments, but many things will depend heavily on the menu. All businesses are unique and may require a different combination of sinks, storage, refrigeration, and other equipment to support the business.

SINKS, EQUIPMENT & FACILITY

Hand washing sinks: All facilities are required to have adequate employee hand washing sinks, conveniently located in each food and dish-washing area, and equipped with soap and disposable towels or hand dryers, as well as a nearby trash can. Convenient location indicates that the sink is accessible within a certain distance and visible from any food area, including bars and ice dispensing locations such as wait stations. These sinks are required to have signs reminding employees to wash hands. Exception: In facilities that serve only prepackaged foods, a hand sink is only required in a restroom.

HELPFUL TIP: Each sink described in this section can only be used for its designated purpose (hand washing, dishwashing, food prep, mop sink, dump sink).

Dishwashing sinks: A 3-compartment sink designated for dish-washing is required in any operation that sells or serves unpackaged food. The sink should have curved interior edges and at least three (3) compartments for washing, rinsing and sanitizing. The sink should also have two (2) drainboards, one for collection of dirty dishes and the other for air drying. See the example on page 13. Each compartment of the sink must be large enough to submerge the largest piece of equipment you have (i.e. a small bar sink would not be acceptable for washing large pots and pans).

Though commercial, automatic dishwashers are allowed, they are *optional*. A three-compartment sink is required in all facilities as noted above.

Utility sink: Also called a mop sink or service sink, all facilities are required to have a sink designated for cleaning of mops and cleaning tools, and for disposal of mop water. The utility sink must include a faucet and drain. Hooks or other means to allow mops to air dry should be provided near sink.

HELPFUL TIP: A curbed sink provides an easier means to dump mop water, and is a good storage spot for the mop bucket when not in use.

Food prep sink (also called vegetable, food processing, or scullery sink): The Cincinnati Health Department does not allow food prep in a hand sink or dish-washing sink. A separate sink is required for the prepping of produce and other foods. Processing can include washing, soaking, thawing, and using ice baths for cooling. If a food prep sink is not available, a facility will be limited to using only pre-washed/pre-cut produce. A food prep sink must have an indirect drain, specifically an air gap, to prevent back-flow from a sewage system into equipment in which food is placed.

HELPFUL TIP: Installing a food sink with an integral drainboard will provide you with a food prep surface for items washed in the sink.

Dump sink: Bars and coffee/smoothie/ice cream shops often require a dedicated dump sink for disposing of liquid waste (leftover drinks). This liquid waste should NOT be disposed of in a hand sink, mop sink, prep sink, toilet or other plumbing fixture used for other purposes. Dump sinks should be indirectly connected and empty into an approved waste receptor such as a floor drain, hub drain, or floor sink.

HELPFUL TIP: A 4-compartment sink is often used behind the bar as a combination dump sink and 3-compartment sink.

Commercial equipment: All equipment used for a retail food operation must be listed as commercial and must be certified by a recognized testing agency (e.g. NSF, ETL, UL sanitation). No household equipment is permitted. Casters are required for large equipment if it is not already on legs or permanently fixed (caulked) to the floor with space for cleaning.

HELPFUL TIP: Check the label on the equipment or request a specification sheet from the vendor before purchasing. Request casters for larger pieces, such as coolers, to make them easier to move for cleaning.

Ventilation hoods: A ventilation hood is required at a grill line, or where other cooking equipment and high temperature dish machines are located, to prevent the accumulation of grease, heat, condensation, smoke and vapors. Installation of a ventilation hood requires a permit and inspections. Contact the Cincinnati Building Department with questions about ventilation requirements or permits for installation.

Fire suppression system: If a ventilation hood is required because of the use of grease producing equipment (fryers, grill, etc), a Type I Hood with fire suppression is required. The fire suppression system acts like a fire extinguisher in case of a grease or cooking fire. If a hood is required for heat, condensation or gas only, a Type II Hood might be allowed. Verify the type of hood required through the Building Department (contact information on page 2).

Grease interceptor (grease trap): A grease trap is a device that is attached to sinks and/or drains to collect fats, oils and grease in order to prevent accumulation in our sewer system. Grease traps are connected to dish-washing sinks, some floor drains (e.g. at wok lines) and some dishwashers. Grease traps are not a requirement of the Cincinnati Health Department but, if installed, must be easily accessible for cleaning. Contact the Metropolitan Sewer District or your licensed plumber with questions regarding whether a grease trap is needed in your facility, size if required, and installation.

HELPFUL TIP: A grease trap can be a costly installation, and is generally required when a dishwashing sink is used. Make sure to research and budget for this item in your planning stages.

HELPFUL TIP: Grease traps must be cleaned periodically to keep them working properly. An indoor grease trap may need to be cleaned monthly/quarterly, while a larger outdoor unit may only need cleaning once or twice per year.

Smooth and easily cleanable surfaces: All floors, walls and ceilings in food areas (service, storage, preparation, dish-washing) must be smooth, easily cleanable, and in some areas, moisture-resistant. Carpet is allowed only in dining areas & areas used for packaged food storage. Approved surfaces which are commonly used:

- Floors: quarry tile, ceramic tile, sealed concrete, poured epoxy
- Walls: stainless steel, FRP, glossy painted drywall, painted concrete block
- Ceilings: vinyl coated ACT (drop ceiling), glossy painted drywall
- Base Coving: tile, rubber

HELPFUL TIP: Every facility must submit a finish schedule as part of the FFR.

Adequate lighting: Lighting must be of sufficient intensity in food areas and other areas to allow for safe work conditions and to facilitate cleaning. A guide to general lighting intensity requirements are listed below:

- 50 foot candles: cooking areas, food prep areas, food service areas
- 20 foot candles: customer self service, inside equipment (e.g. reach in cooler), hand washing, dish-washing, utensil storage, restrooms
- 10 foot candles: walk-in coolers and freezers, dry storage, and other areas

HELPFUL TIP: When submitting a lighting plan for plan review, it should include (1) type of fixtures, (2) location of fixtures, and (3) whether using plastic covers, shields, or shatterproof bulbs to protect food & equipment.

Dry storage space: Enough space must be planned for storage of food, dishes, and equipment. Ensure that there are designated locations for bulk foods, cans, and other items. All food items must be stored at least 6" off the floor, both in walk-in coolers or freezers, and on storage shelving. Metal office shelving and raw wood shelves are not allowed. Look for wire racks and food grade shelving. Equipment and single service items (e.g. 'to go' containers) must be protected from contamination and stored at least 6" off the floor.

HELPFUL TIP: Bins for bulk items (e.g. rice, flour) must be made of food grade material and marked with the type of food inside. Trash cans and non-food grade containers cannot be used for bulk food storage.

Chemical storage: Chemicals must be stored below and/or away from food items, equipment and utensils to prevent contamination of these items. Chemicals cannot be stored above the dishwashing sink or on the floor.

Cold Storage: Make sure you have plenty of commercial cold holding units that were designed specifically for your intended use. You should have plenty of refrigerator and freezer space to maintain the temperature of cold and frozen food, as well as space to separate foods where necessary (i.e. ready-to-eat from raw, meats from produce, thawing from cooling, etc.). Walk-in units should have easily cleanable racks that are elevated off the ground.

Employee area: There must be lockers, shelving or a designated area provided only for employee belongings. Personal belongings such as coats, purses, cigarettes, and phones cannot be kept in food areas.

RUNNING YOUR BUSINESS

(WITH FOOD SAFETY IN MIND)

Here are some important questions about how you will safely prepare food for your business that you should start to think about. These questions may also be asked during future inspections:

Employee Training:

- How will you train your staff about food safety?
- What food safety practices will be covered during staff orientation?
- What is your employee health policy? What do you do about a sick worker? How will you share this policy with employees?

Services:

- Who will provide your waste pickup?
- How will you handle grease waste and cleaning your grease interceptor?
- Do you have a certified pest control operator?
- Who will clean your hood system and/or fire suppression system?
- Who will provide support and maintenance for your dishwasher?
- Is your facility secure, and is your food supply safe? Do you make sure to use approved suppliers? Does your food come from approved sources?

Facilities:

- Do you have enough hot water capacity for the busiest time of day?
- Do you have the storage space needed for dry goods?
- Do you plan to expand the operation, and will you have the space?
- Are floors, walls and ceilings constructed with cleanable materials?

Equipment/Supplies:

- Do you have enough space in your coolers and freezers? Can you prevent overstocking and make certain to allow for air circulation?
- How will you keep hot foods hot?
- How will you keep cold foods cold?
- Have you purchased thermometers for all coolers? Do you have thermometers for taking food temperatures?
- Do you have the appropriate supplies to run your business (equipment, gloves, hair coverings, sanitizer, test strips, thermometers, etc)?

Plan for Easy Cleaning:

There are several things you can do to prevent the amount of future maintenance necessary for your facility and provide ease of cleaning.

- Have you considered stainless steel on walls at the grill line, and behind and around grease producing equipment?

- Have you placed heavy equipment on casters, so that it can be moved easily? Every other piece of equipment, especially at the grill line, should be on casters. This makes it easier to clean behind and between equipment.
- Can you avoid sealing equipment and sinks to walls, and instead brace and set equipment away from walls and other equipment? This makes it easier to clean behind 3 compartment sinks, dishwashers, etc. Set equipment at least 4 inches from the wall.

Fixed Equipment:

- Is all equipment that is fixed (because it is not easily movable) installed to allow for easy cleaning? This means that it must be spaced from nearby equipment or sealed to walls or equipment .
- Is table mounted equipment that is not easily moveable on legs or sealed to a table?
- Is all floor mounted equipment (in kitchen areas) that is not easily movable sealed to the floor or elevated on 6 inch legs?

Processes:

- What will be your process for date marking ready-to-eat food products?
- How will you ensure that a 'first in, first out' system is used for foods?
- How will foods be properly thawed? Do you have enough cooler space to allow for overnight thawing?
- Can large amounts of leftover food be properly cooled? Do you have shallow pans, ice wands, or other necessary tools?
- Will you keep temperature logs? Who will be responsible? When will you take temperatures?
- How will you avoid bare hand contact with ready to eat foods? Will you use gloves, tongs, utensils, deli paper, or other tools?
- Do you have Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) plans for acidifying rice, sous vide cooking methods, vacuum packaging, etc? Do you have written procedures for other complex or specialized processes in your facility?

FOOD SAFETY EDUCATION

Educating your employees is an important part of planning for a successful food business and is a requirement of your food service license.

The Ohio Uniform Food Code requires that someone with the level one food safety certification, known as Person-in-Charge (PIC) training, be present during all hours of operation of a licensed food business. The PIC must understand basic food safety concepts, and will need to demonstrate knowledge by compliance with the food code. This person must make sure that safe food handling practices are followed to lower the risk of foodborne illness.

In addition, each risk level III and risk level IV food service operation and retail food establishment shall have at least one employee that has the level two food safety certification (often called the Manager's Course). That person should have supervisory and management responsibility and the authority to direct and control food preparation - they should be available, but do not need to be on-site at all times.

For more information about training, contact the Cincinnati Health Department.

STEPS TO OPENING YOUR BUSINESS

The Cincinnati Health Department reviews facility plans to make sure that the design and equipment in a facility are proper for the storage, preparation and service of the foods on the proposed menu or food list.

Step 1: FOOD FACILITY REVIEW (FFR)

Who must submit an FFR application?*

- New facilities: New construction and facilities that have never been licensed as a food operation in the past.
- Remodeled or altered facilities: Major changes or alterations such as installation of a walk in cooler or ventilation hood, or expanding a kitchen.
- Change of business: Changes in layout or equipment (example: a new owner converts a bakery into a full service restaurant, and grills and ovens have been added to the kitchen).

*If you are not sure whether a food facility review is required, please contact CHD.

What is the fee?

Fees are based on the proposed risk level of a facility - the risk level is based on the menu. If you don't know the risk level of your facility, contact CHD for help in making the determination.

What is the process?

After submitting your application and supporting documents (see application for required documents and submission instructions) CHD will begin reviewing the FFR. CHD has up to 30 days to begin the review, so please plan accordingly. If there are any questions about the plans, or changes that need to be discussed, we will contact you (generally by phone or e-mail). When plans are approved, we will notify you (generally by phone or e-mail). When the FFR is approved, we will notify you (generally by phone or e-mail). A formal approval letter will follow, and will be sent to the contact noted on the FFR application.

When should the FFR application be submitted?

The FFR application should be submitted as soon as you have a planned layout and equipment, but before work begins at the facility. This application can be processed at the same time as other building permit applications. Plumbing permits for a given project will generally not be issued until the food facility review applications has been submitted and approve.

Step 2: LICENSING

Licensing Inspection: After the FFR application has been approved and all work is complete, you will need to contact CHD for a licensing inspection. The licensing inspection can be conducted once you have all required sign-offs from the appropriate city departments. (Newly constructed facilities will need to have final approval from the Building Department before a license can be issued.)

Licensing: If there are no outstanding issues identified at the licensing inspection, payment will be collected for the license, and a signed license application will be given indicating permission to operate. At this point the operation is licensed and approved to operate. The printed license will be sent to you in the mail. All licenses issued before December 1 must be renewed by March 1st of the following year. Licenses renewed after March 1st will be assessed a late fee.

HOW DO I KNOW WHEN I'M READY FOR MY LICENSING INSPECTION?

Have you completed all items on this checklist? If YES, you are ready!

- I have read the 'Starting a Food Business' guide to help design my facility based on menu items and processes.
- I submitted plans, FFR application and fee to the Cincinnati Health Department.
- I received FFR approval from Cincinnati Health Department and the Building Department.
- Work was performed by licensed contractors and permits were obtained when necessary.
- All construction or remodel work is complete.
- FOR A NEW FACILITY: I have a certificate of occupancy (CO) or temporary CO from the Building Department - OR -
- FOR A REMODEL: I have final approval for any work performed, including inspections and sign offs on permits.
- I have contacted the Cincinnati Health Department for licensing inspection.
- Before the scheduled opening inspection (not all inclusive list):
 - Construction is complete; all equipment is installed and functioning properly.
 - Kitchen/food areas are clean, everything is installed/working and ready to use.
 - Space is customer ready, but with no food in cold holding equipment (yet).
 - Required supplies, such as sanitizer, sanitizer test kit, thermometers, gloves are on-site.
 - Hot water is available at all sinks.
 - Refrigerated equipment is running at 41°F or below.
 - The dish machine (if applicable) is in operation.
 - The CO or TCO paperwork (from Building Dept) is on-site.
 - Payment is available for the license fee.

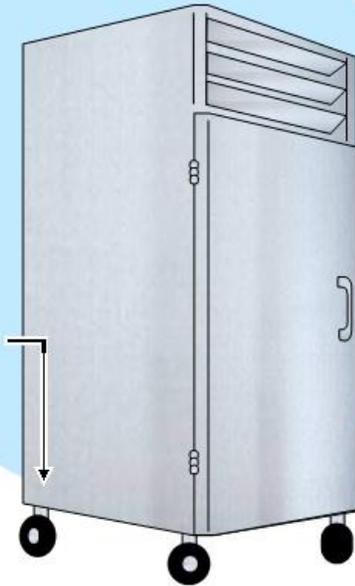
EQUIPMENT EXAMPLES

HANDWASHING SINK

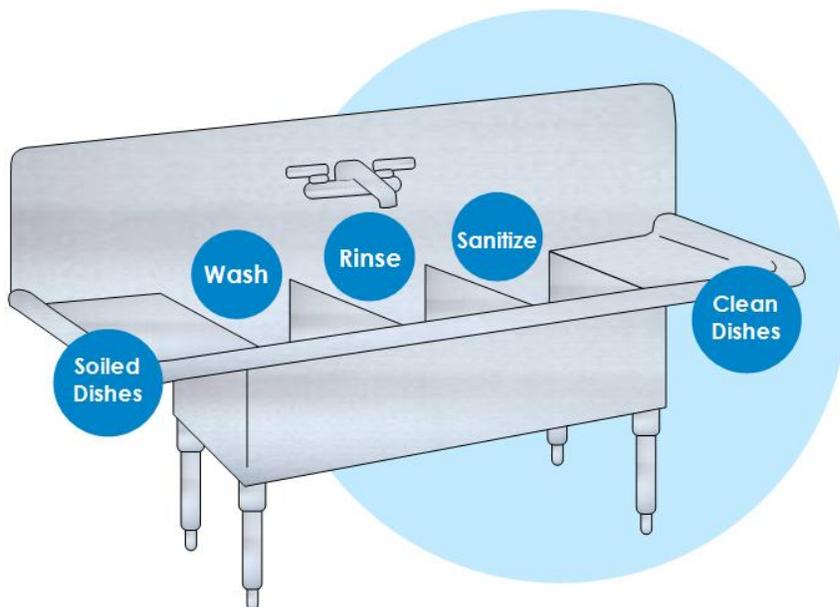


REACH-IN REFRIGERATOR

On casters so it's easy to move and clean around

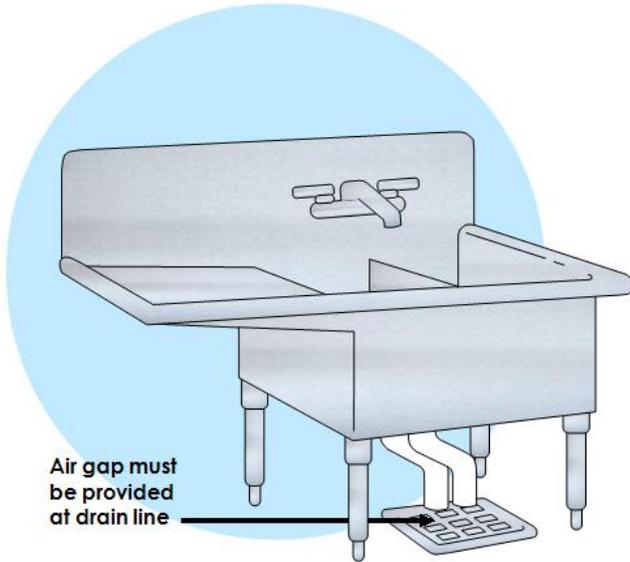


3 COMPARTMENT SINK

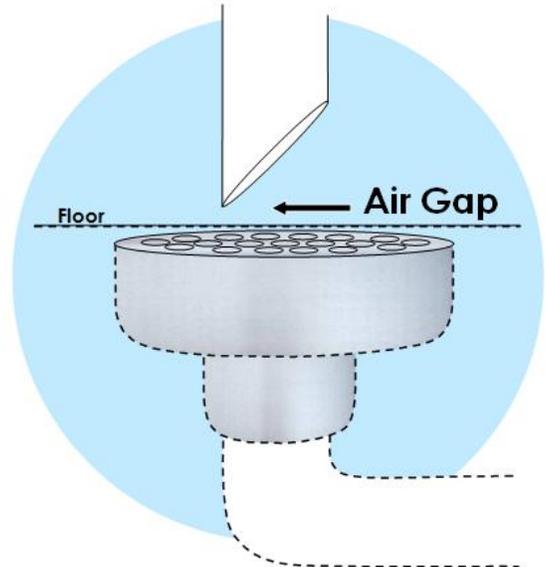


EQUIPMENT EXAMPLES, CONTINUED

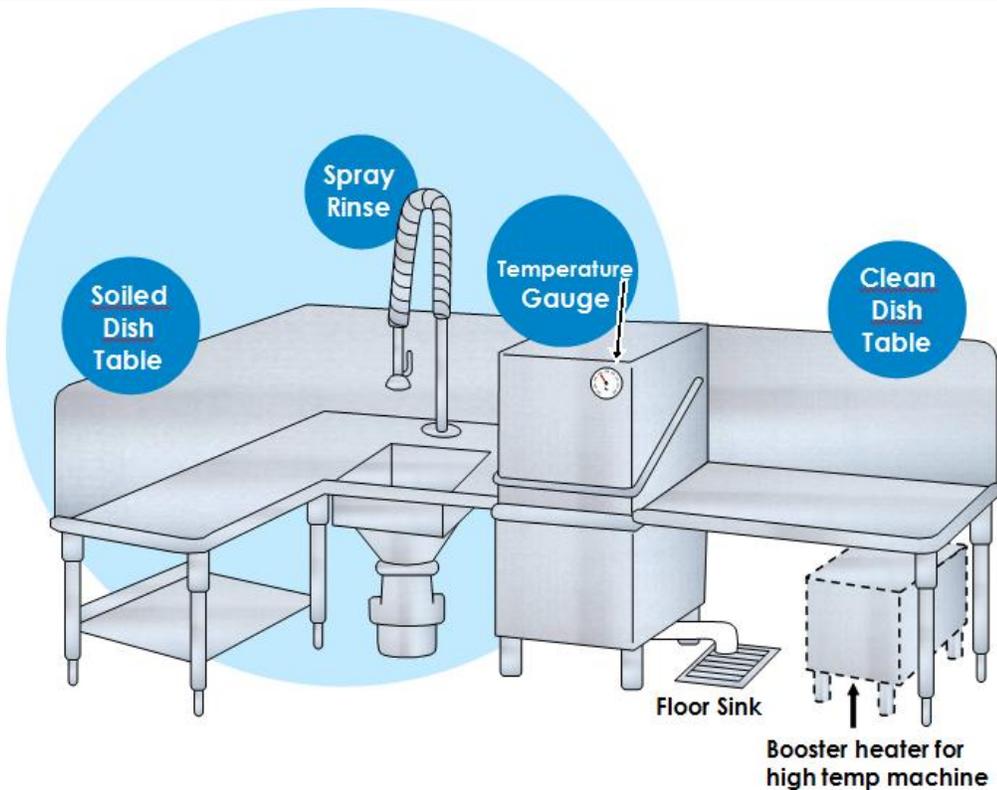
FOOD PREPARATION SINK



INDIRECT CONNECTION



COMMERCIAL DISHWASHER



FEE SCHEDULE (AS OF 3/1/2023)

A variety of payment types are accepted for plan review fees. License fees are payable with check or money order only.

PLAN REVIEW FEES	New, remodeled	Minimal Changes
Risk level 1 & 2, <10,000 sq ft	\$200.00	\$100.00
Risk level 3 & 4, <10,000 sq ft	\$400.00	\$200.00
Risk level 1 & 2, >10,000 sq ft	\$300.00	\$150.00
Risk level 3 & 4, >10,000 sq ft	\$600.00	\$300.00

The plan review fee must be submitted with FFR application.

Risk level 1 and 2 facilities sell pre-packaged snacks foods and beverages; pre-packaged refrigerated or frozen foods; coffee and self-service fountain drinks; minimal or no food handling.

Risk level 3 and 4 facilities are generally more complex operations such as restaurants and grocery stores that prepare and assemble food.

2023 FSO/RFE LICENSE FEES	<25,000 ft²	>25,000 ft²
Risk Class 1	\$321.00	\$453.00
Risk Class 2	\$359.00	\$476.00
Risk Class 3	\$663.00	\$1625.00
Risk Class 4	\$834.00	\$1721.00

The license fee will be collected at the final inspection. Please do not send it to our office.