



For Immediate Release:

October 15, 2010

Mobile Food Facility Grading Program Frequently Asked Questions

For the Public:

1. What is a mobile food facility?

Mobile food facilities include “high risk” vendors such as mobile food preparation unit vehicles, which are full-service food vehicles such as catering, taco or soft-serve ice cream trucks; limited food service vehicles, which are cooked-to-order carts that prepare food in an open manner, such as tacos and bacon-wrapped hot dogs; and food carts that prepare and serve steamed hot dogs. These are considered “high risk” because of the types of food offered and the high degree of food handling and preparation.

“Low risk” mobile food facilities include vehicles and carts that sell pre-packaged goods such as ice cream, beverages and snacks, and limited unpackaged foods such as churros, pretzels, and shaved ice. These are labeled “low risk” because they involve minimal or no food handling and the food products are not considered potentially hazardous for foodborne illness.

2. How many of these vendors are in Los Angeles County?

There are approximately 6,000 actively permitted mobile food facilities.

3. Why should mobile food facilities receive grades?

The success of the Restaurant Grading Program has demonstrated that residents of Los Angeles County have come to expect a certain level of food safety when eating at a brick and mortar facility, such as a restaurant. These facilities are inspected by Public Health for proven safe food handling techniques, cleanliness, and a demonstrated concern for the health and safety of consumers. By applying these same requirements to mobile food facilities, Angelenos can be confident and empowered in making healthier decisions about the food they are eating based on objective food safety findings and criteria. The Mobile Food Facility Grading Program will also help consumers differentiate between permitted and non-permitted food vendors.

4. Is there proof that unpermitted mobile food facilities cause more foodborne illness than permitted food facilities?

The same problems that are found during food facility inspections, such as a lack of employee hygiene, cross contamination of food preparation surfaces, or a lack of overall cleanliness, are the same problems that are proven to cause foodborne illness. These conditions occur routinely at facilities not under inspection.

By requiring all food facilities to undergo inspection and maintain current permits, the risk of foodborne illness can be greatly reduced through educating food handlers on safe food handling



techniques, requiring facilities to meet requisite standards of cleanliness and notifying the public when a facility has not met these standards.

5. How big of a problem are unlicensed mobile food facilities?

Unlicensed food facilities, whether mobile or not, is pervasive throughout the county and is increasing in scope and numbers. These facilities routinely lack basic food safety requirements such as temperature maintenance equipment like refrigeration; employees that are trained in safe food handling techniques and hygiene; and hand washing and restroom facilities. They also often use food from unapproved sources. This program will help eliminate mobile food facilities that do not demonstrate concern for the health and safety of their customers by adhering to minimum standards of cleanliness.

6. How soon will grades start appearing on mobile food facilities?

Once the ordinance is adopted by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, mobile food vendors that frequent the unincorporated areas of the county will have posted letter grades within 30 days. Mobile food vendors that frequent other areas of the county will have posted letter grades by the end of 2010, as various cities adopt this ordinance.

7. Where will these grades be posted?

On motorized food preparation units, the grades will be posted near the pass-through service window. On food carts and limited food vehicles, the grades will be posted on the customer side of the vehicle. These grades cannot be removed, unless by a Public Health inspector, and must be clearly visible to the public.

8. What will the grades look like?

They will look the same as the A, B, C grade placards the public is already used to seeing in brick and mortar restaurant or other retail food facilities.

9. How can the public tell the posted grade actually belongs to the mobile food facility?

The license plate number and the vehicle VIN number will be posted on the letter grade itself, in the lower half of the placard. For facilities without a license plate, a file number and a certification number will be posted on the placard.

10. Does Public Health have the resources to enforce this new program?

Currently, yes. The Mobile Food Facility Grading Program will increase the workload for Public Health inspectors by one additional inspection per facility every year. The first year of the program will help Public Health determine its future staffing needs.

11. How much money will be generated by this new program?

No additional income or profit for Los Angeles County or the Department of Public Health will be generated by this program. As with all Public Health inspection programs, the fees are designed to recover only costs that are associated with the inspection.

12. How can the public report complaints regarding licensed and unlicensed food facilities?

There are several ways the public can make complaints on any food facility:



- By calling the Department of Public Health Environmental Health 24-Hour hotline at (888) 700-9995.
- By logging onto the Environmental Health Report-a-Problem page at <https://admin.publichealth.lacounty.gov/phcommon/complaints/phcomp.cfm>.
- By e-mailing Environmental Health at ehmail@ph.lacounty.gov.
- By faxing a letter to Environmental Health at (626) 813-3000.
- By sending a letter to Environmental Health at
County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Health
Environmental Health
5050 Commerce Drive
Baldwin Park, CA 91706.

For Food Facility Operators:

1. How can an operator find out about the requirements of the Mobile Food Facility Grading Program?

There are two ways:

- By contacting the Department of Public Health Environmental Health Vehicle Inspection Program at (626) 430-5500.
- By logging onto the Environmental Health website at <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/eh/food.htm>.

The Department of Public Health has also reached out to several organizations that represent mobile food facility operators in order to provide them with information regarding the letter grading program, the permit process, and applicable state and local regulations. These organizations included the California Restaurant Association, the Southern California Mobile Vendors Association, the East Los Angeles Community Corporation, and Association de Loncheros. These organizations to date have expressed support for the Mobile Food Facility Grading Program.

2. How will inspections of mobile food facilities be different than inspections of brick and mortar food businesses?

There is no significant difference in the inspection requirements for either type of facility.

3. How will Public Health inspectors find a mobile food facility in order to conduct an inspection?

Mobile food facility operators are required to disclose information regarding their business location or route. This can be done several ways: by filling out a Route Slip Form and faxing, e-mailing, or mailing the form to the Vehicle Inspection Program or providing route information posted on a social network, such as Twitter, or on the company's website.

4. When will the Mobile Food Facility Grading Program begin?

The program will be implemented immediately after the ordinance is adopted by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors for unincorporated areas of the county, and after ordinance adoption by each of the 85 contract cities within the county.



The program will consist of two phases:

- Phase One will cover high risk facilities such as mobile food preparation units, limited food vehicles and food carts.
- Phase Two, which is expected to start approximately one year after Phase One, will cover low risk facilities such as vehicles and carts that serve pre-packaged and limited unpackaged foods.

5. What are the current fees for inspections of mobile food facilities?

The current fees range from \$297 annually for a low risk vendor, to \$695 annually for a high risk vendor. Fees are based on the type of facility, the manner in which food is prepared, and overall evaluation.

6. What if a food facility operator has a dispute about the letter grade?

Consistent with the current Restaurant Grading Program, mobile food facility operators can dispute findings and/or grades by contacting the Environmental Health Inspection Program or may opt to contact the Environmental Health Office of the Ombudsman.

7. Can a mobile food facility operator opt out of the program?

No. All operators, regardless of type of facility, with a current permit are required to be inspected and issued a letter grade. Those without a current permit are not authorized to sell food.

For more information about Mobile Food Facility or other retail food facility requirements, visit the Environmental Health website at <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/eh/food.htm>.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises more than 4,000 employees and has an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do, please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>, visit our YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/lapublichealth>, or follow us on Twitter: LAPublicHealth.

###