



**County of Ventura**  
**Environmental Health Division**  
 800 South Victoria Avenue  
 Ventura, California 93009-1730



# I Want to Open a Food Facility

## What Do I Need to Do?



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### This information will help you avoid **COSTLY** mistakes and time loss!

#### Six Steps to Get Open:

1. Contact the Environmental Health Division and obtain your free “Plan Check Guide for Food Facilities”. The “Plan Check Guide” can also be downloaded from our website.
2. To begin construction, submit 3 sets of complete plans and obtain approval from the Environmental Health Division and the local Building and Safety Department.
3. Proceed with construction pursuant to approved plans.
4. Call for a preliminary construction inspection.
5. Call for a final construction inspection.
6. Inspection and issuance of Permit to Operate.

#### **1** Contact the Environmental Health Division and obtain our “Plan Check Guide for Food Facilities”

Begin by contacting one of the Ventura County Environmental Health Division Food Program Plan Check Specialists at 805/654-2813 for information or answers to questions you may have.

#### **Why contact the Environmental Health Division?**

The Environmental Health Division (Division) will provide you with information regarding the minimum structural standards that apply to all food facilities. The Division is the agency responsible for enforcement of California laws and regulations, including the California Retail Food Code (Cal Code), which specifies the minimum structural and operational standards for all retail food facilities.

#### **Why do I need The “Plan Check Guide for Food Facilities”?**

When you contact the Environmental Health Division about opening a food facility, you will be given the Division’s “Plan Check for Food Facilities”. This guide outlines all of the items that must be specified on the plans. These items include, but are not limited to: floor plan; equipment layout; equipment key, including a list of manufacturer names and model numbers; plumbing and electrical layouts; exhaust ventilation and makeup air systems; finish schedule for floors, base, walls and ceiling; and hot water provisions.

#### **2** To begin construction, submit 3 sets of complete plans and obtain approval from the Environmental Health Division and the local Building and Safety Department

#### **Am I required to have a professional firm draw up the plans?**

NO. However, depending on the complexity of your project, the involvement of a professional design firm may assist in timely approval. Most experienced design firms are aware of Cal Code requirements and local building codes. Professional knowledge of efficient space planning; exhaust and makeup air requirements; plumbing and electrical standards; custom equipment design; floor, wall and ceiling finishes; and equipment specifications may be required for plan approval.

#### **How do I submit my plans?**

After your plans are drawn, bring 3 complete sets of plans to the Environmental Health Division, which is located at 800 S. Victoria Ave., Ventura, in the County Government Center Complex, Administration Building, third floor. You will complete an “Application for Permit to Construct,” and a plan check fee will be assessed which is based on the total square footage of the facility. The fee is due at the time of plan submittal.

During the plan check process, you may be requested to submit samples of any finished materials proposed for use in the facility. You may also be asked to provide specific information regarding any proposed equipment and methods of operation or food preparation. This is especially true if what you propose is something new and different!

#### **How long will it take to have my plans reviewed?**

One of the Division’s Plan Check Specialists will notify you within 20 business days from receipt of the plans and application whether your plans have been approved or rejected. **Construction shall NOT begin without plan approval issued by the Environmental Health Division and the local Building and Safety Department.**

**What if the plans I submit are not adequate?**

Plans that are incomplete or that require a significant number of changes will be rejected and returned to the applicant. If your plans are rejected, a letter accompanying them will indicate any required changes or modifications, or any additional information needed by the Plan Check Specialist before your plans can be evaluated again. Once returned to you, complete or revise your plans as indicated and resubmit 3 sets of plans for review. There is an additional fee for resubmittals past the first

**Are there other agencies involved in the plan check process?**

YES. For that reason, 3 sets of plans are required to be submitted. After the plans have been approved and stamped, the Environmental Health Division will keep one set on file for one year and the remaining 2 sets will be returned to you. These 2 sets are to be submitted to the Building and Safety Department having jurisdiction. Building and Safety will also stamp the plans upon approval, keeping one set for their files. The one set remaining is returned to you with conditions and approvals from both departments and is to be used as the site copy.

**I have purchased a currently operating food facility, is a plan review still required?**

IT MAY BE!

- A plan review is required if you do any construction, remodeling, enlarging, altering, or converting of any building for use as a food facility. In other words, if you need to obtain any building permit from a Building and Safety Department, a plan review is also required by the County Environmental Health Division. Additionally, a plan review may be required if any integral equipment has been replaced or modified, or if any new equipment has been added
- Equipment that is now in the food facility you purchased may not meet current health code requirements, and you may need to replace it with approved equipment.

*Food-related and utensil-related equipment that met the code requirements in effect at the time of installation, yet failed to meet subsequent*

*changed requirements, were “grandfathered.” This means that even though they did not meet the new code requirements, they continued to be accepted for use in that facility as long as they did not pose a health risk, and as long as neither ownership nor type of operation of the original food facility changed.*

*However, when ownership of the facility changes, the non-code-compliant equipment is no longer considered to be “grandfathered”, and is not permitted for use by the new owner.*

*Additionally, equipment that does not meet current code requirements, but was “grandfathered”, in one facility cannot be used in a different facility.*

*“Grandfathered” equipment is acceptable for use only in its original facility, under the original owner, and under its original conditions of approval.*

- Even though the facility may not require a plan review, we advise you to contact the Environmental Health Division before you purchase or lease an existing food facility and request an inspection of the facility. The Environmental Health Specialist can let you know of any violations of Cal Code indicated on previous inspection reports, or any pending enforcement actions.

Your food facility must be in compliance with all Cal Code requirements before you are issued a “Permit to Operate.” Permits are not transferable so an inspection must be completed and a new permit obtained prior to operating under new ownership.

**3 Proceed with construction pursuant to approved plans**

Once the plans have been approved by both the Environmental Health Division and the local Building and Safety Department, construction of the facility may begin. The facility **must** be constructed as designed and approved on the plans. The conditions of approval contained in the approval letter must be incorporated into the construction. Should you decide to make any changes in the design of the facility **after** plan approval has been obtained, you must contact the Environmental Health Division for approval of each change.

**4 Call your assigned Plan Check Specialist for a preliminary construction inspection**

Request a construction inspection when your facility is at 80-90% completion, i.e., when plumbing, ventilation, and equipment are installed, but are not yet finished. Telephone at least 3 business days in advance to arrange for a construction inspection. The intent of the construction inspection at this time is to ensure that the facility is being constructed according to the approved plans. Although the plans have been approved, only thorough on-site inspection can full Cal Code compliance be determined.

**5 Call your assigned Plan Check Specialist for a final construction inspection**

An Environmental Health Specialist (EHS) will conduct a final inspection just prior to the opening of your food facility. At the time of the final inspection, all construction, including finish work, must be complete and all equipment must be in operation with hot and cold running water supplied to all appropriate fixtures. **It is the responsibility of the owner of the facility to contact the Environmental Health Division at least 3 working days in advance to arrange for the final inspection. Additional inspection fees will be assessed for more than 3 construction inspections.**

**6 Inspection and Issuance of Permit to Operate**

**Once the construction is approved, how do I apply for the “Permit to Operate” from the Environmental Health Division?**

If the facility has been built according to the approved plans and conditions, and the EHS finds that the facility meets requirements for operation, then the EHS completes an “Application for Permit to Operate.” Verify and confirm all the information on this application before you sign it! Food preparation may begin only after the “Application for Permit to Operate” has been signed and issued by the EHS.

The “Application for Permit to Operate” will indicate the annual permit fee. The fee must be paid within 3 working days from the date of issuance. After payment is received, the owner will receive a permanent copy of the “Permit to Operate.”

This permanent copy:

- Must be posted in public view in the facility. The owner is not issued new permanent copies in succeeding years of operation. If the permit is lost, there is a nominal replacement fee.
- Is **non-transferable**, which means that the permit is valid **only** for the person (i.e., persons or corporation) to whom it was issued. The permit is valid **only** for that location and only for the type of food sales or distribution activity approved.
- Is valid for one year from the date of opening unless suspended or revoked for cause by the Environmental Health Division. Each year the Environmental Health Division will notify you by mail that your annual health permit fee is due. You must pay the annual fee within 30 days from the “date of issue” shown on the bill. If payment is not received, you will be assessed late charges. Notify the Environmental Health Division of any change in mailing address to ensure timely receipt.

Once a “Permit to Operate” has been issued and you decide to make any modifications, such as adding new equipment or replacing any floor or ceiling material, you are advised to contact the Environmental Health Division.

**For Information:**

[Plan Check Specialists](#)

- Telephone: 805/654-2813
- Fax: 805/654-2480

[Website: vcrma.org/divisions/environmental-health](http://vcrma.org/divisions/environmental-health)  
Then, click on *Food Protection; Consumer Food Protection*;  
Then click on *Plan Review Requirements*