



WEEK-END BUFFETS, BRUNCHES, AND OTHER TEMPORARY BUFFET-TYPE FOOD SERVICE OPERATIONS

These guidelines address the operational and structural requirements for the operation of “Sunday brunches”, “buffets”, and other **temporary** buffet-type food service operations. The requirements in these guidelines are based on the California Uniform Retail Food Facilities Law (CURFFL) and the “Buffet Service Guidelines” developed by the Food Committee of the California Conference of Directors of Environmental Health.

I. Definitions of Commonly Used Terms

A. Temporary Buffet - any nonpermanent operation conducted in a restaurant, bar, market, etc. where unpackaged food is displayed, served and/or prepared for the general public from counters, tables or similar portable or readily movable equipment. The buffet may be located in dining rooms, lobbies, meeting rooms, bar areas, or other areas not traditionally used for food preparation and service. (**Outdoor food preparation, display, service, or storage is not allowed.**) The operation of temporary buffets is limited to periods of time on an intermittent, irregular, or non-scheduled basis, generally occurring on weekends or evenings.

B. Regularly Occurring Buffet - the operation of a service line or service line equipment whether installed, movable or portable, which is used for buffet service at scheduled or fixed times or periodic intervals. For instance, buffet service which occurs daily, weekly, Sunday mornings, Tuesdays and Thursdays, etc., is regularly occurring.

C. Food Service Operations - these activities include, but are not limited to, smorgasbords, salad bars, sandwich bars, hors d'oeuvre tables, brunches, “happy hour” food displays, and food service lines having limited cooking and/or food preparation by employees.

D. Service Line - any table, counter or similar installation or equipment used in buffet service where the customer obtains or receives displayed food.

E. Attended Station - any part of a service line where the food is served or handed to the customer by an employee of the retail food establishment, in accordance with CURFFL.

F. Cooking Station - any attended station of a service line where food is prepared for individual customers. (Preparation includes omelets, crepes, pancakes, waffles, meat or steak grilling, carving, and assembling of sandwiches or tacos)

G. Food Preparation - the packaging, processing, assembling, portioning, or any other operation that changes the form, flavor, or consistency of food.



II. Do I need any prior approvals or permits?

Yes. Any food establishment proposing a temporary buffet shall inform the Department of Environmental Health of the design, location, and equipment to be used. Even though the food facility may already meet current standards, the addition of each installation must be approved by the Department and must also comply with all applicable regulations enforced by the fire department and local building department.

III. At what temperatures can I display my food?

All potentially hazardous foods held for dispensing on serving lines and salad bars during periods not to exceed 12 hours in any 24 hour period shall be maintained at or below 45° F or at or above 135° F. Potentially hazardous foods must be rapidly heated or cooled to the required temperatures before being placed for display on the service line. Steam tables, chafing dishes, Bain Maries and other hot holding devices are not rapid heating devices.

IV. What are the guidelines for service line cooking stations?

All food establishments shall provide sufficient ventilation to prevent heat, grease, gases, or smoke from accumulating on the floors, walls, ceilings and surfaces of equipment in these areas of the retail food establishment.

The CCDEH ventilation guidelines exempt certain small, individual, portable (88 pounds or less) cooking appliances from canopy and hood ventilation requirements when there is sufficient area ventilation to remove gases, odors, steam, heat, grease, vapors, or smoke. Exempted units include but are not limited to the following:

- a) Crepe makers
- b) Waffle iron
- c) Low temperature rotisseries
- d) Small hot plates (1.5 kW/5000 BTU or less)

NOTE: This exemption only applies in situations where food is prepared on an individual customer basis.

The use of multiple cooking appliances (i.e. crepe pans, waffle irons, Sterno units, etc.) in a service line, which individually may be exempt, will necessitate further evaluation by this Dept.

V. How can I protect my food products in a service line?

All food displayed or prepared in a service line, and all preparation surfaces located within 30 inches of the customer shall be effectively shielded with an approved sneeze guard. Sneeze guards serve as a protective barrier between the customer's mouth and the food and food preparation surfaces. Contact this Department for "Sneeze Guard Guidelines".

Food displayed at an unattended service line shall be protected by means of an approved sneeze guard or displayed in a container with a tight fitting, securely attached lid (e.g. soup kettles, roll-top chafing dishes, etc.).

Food displayed at an attended service line where the food is served to the customer by an employee, shall be protected by means of an approved sneeze guard or displayed in clean, sanitary, covered containers (where the cover is replaced after each serving). Containers such as rolltop or half-dome chafing dishes should be oriented so that when the container is opened, only the attending employee directly faces the food.

All sneeze guards must be installed and adjusted as necessary during operation to maintain constant protection of displayed food items as required by this guide.



VI. What utensils are needed in a service line?

Each service container of food displayed at a service line must be provided with at least one appropriately sized serving utensil for use exclusively with that container. The utensil must be of sufficient size and design to prevent it from falling into or out of the container. The self service utensils must be cleaned and sanitized at least every four hours.

Eating utensils located at a buffet service line must be displayed in a sanitary manner with the food contact surface protected from contamination and unnecessary handling (e.g., eating utensils displayed with the handles up, cups stacked face down, etc.). Plates dispensed from a loadrater or stacked neatly at the service line are acceptable if they are either positioned face down or are shielded by an approved sneeze guard.

A notice or sign large enough to be easily read from the customer service line shall be posted at the head of the service area advising customers to take a clean plate when returning to the service line for a second helping (if additional helpings are permitted) to help prevent any contamination of the food.

VII. Can I set up my buffet on a carpeted floor?

The floor surfaces beneath and extending three (3) feet from the equipment or table on the employee and customer sides of the attended service lines shall be smooth, durable and readily cleanable. This requirement may be met through the application of supplemental flooring such as a mat, plastic carpet runner, or similar temporary covering. This area must be kept clean, in good condition, free of debris, and cleaned after each service period or at the end of the day, as necessary.

VIII. Are there any special requirements for wall and ceiling finishes?

As with any other food storage and/or preparation areas in a restaurant, the walls and ceiling in the temporary buffet area shall be made of material that will not contribute any contamination to the food. Such surfaces shall be kept clean and in good repair. All food and food preparation surfaces shall be protected from overhead contamination. No plants, fans, or other decorative or structural features shall overhang the service line.

IX. Where can I drain wastewater from my buffet table?

All liquid wastes shall be drained, collected, conveyed and discarded in a manner, which prevents the contamination of food, food equipment or utensils and prevents the creation of a nuisance. The use of a floor sink would be the most acceptable method however; other alternatives could be proposed and evaluated by this department.

X. What if I have questions?

If you have any questions regarding week-end buffets, brunches, or other temporary buffet-type food service, contact your local Environmental Health office.

*Document available in an alternate format upon request