

La Crosse County Health Department
300 4th St. N.
La Crosse, WI 54601
608-785-9872

Information for Prospective Operators of Taverns, Restaurants, Grocery Stores, Caterers, and Bakeries 2012

Please note: This document is not a comprehensive list of health code regulations required to operate food or beverage establishments. It briefly summarizes some major requirements to give an idea of equipment and building structure required to serve food or drink to the public. The complete requirements are found in DHS Chapter 196 or ATCP Chapter 75 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code and the Appendix known as the Wisconsin Food Code. You may view these codes at public libraries, on the internet or obtain a copy at the Wisconsin Department of Health Services by calling 608-266-2835. The internet site is listed at the end of this document. Wisconsin building, zoning and fire codes apply to all food establishments and taverns and are regulated by other agencies. Contact your local city, village or town government for additional information on building code requirements and inspections.

All food establishment operators must complete a La Crosse County Health Department **license application** and pay two fees to La Crosse County Health Department before operating a tavern or food establishment. The first fee is the pre-licensing inspection fee which covers the cost of reviewing plans, setting up an account, consulting with district sanitarians, and conducting the initial inspection prior to licensing. The second fee is the annual food establishment license fee which expires every year on June 30th. Restaurant licenses obtained after April 1st are good until June 30th of the following year, and these are called 15-month licenses (this does not apply to tavern, grocery stores, etc). Fees are based upon the complexity of food preparation. Food establishment licenses cannot be transferred from one owner to another or from one location to another. Health Department licenses are issued after all fees are paid and a satisfactory pre-licensing inspection is completed. Food cannot be stored or prepared in an unlicensed location such as a home.

The first step is submission of floor plans and equipment list showing the location of all plumbing fixtures, equipment, seating, and restrooms. Submit these materials to the district sanitarian at La Crosse County Health Department, 300 4th St. North, La Crosse, WI 54601 Phone: 608-785-9872, FAX 608-785-9846. **Existing businesses/buildings almost always require some new equipment and structural upgrades before licenses can be issued to a new operator.** Wisconsin health codes are frequently updated and prospective operators must meet the most current health codes. It is important to discuss your plans with the district sanitarian as early as possible to avoid delays in opening the business.

The following material is a summary of some of the major points covered in the Wisconsin Administrative Code, DHS chapter 196 and ATCP chapter 75. **This summary does not include all requirements found in state codes** and should only be used as an initial guide for planning purposes. These same codes apply to taverns that do not serve food as well as retail food stores, bakeries, etc.

Utensil Sanitizing Facilities: Where manual dishwashing and sanitizing are done, a 3-compartment sink certified by the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) or equivalent ANSI certification is required. The sink must be constructed with drain boards on each side. A 4-compartment NSF-approved sink with adequate drain boards will also meet the requirement. The sinks must be large enough to accommodate at least 50% of the largest item to be washed, rinsed and sanitized. Older seamed sinks are no longer acceptable and have not been manufactured for 20 years. Contact a Wisconsin licensed plumber or local commercial building inspector to determine if a grease trap is required by law. When mechanical cleaning and sanitizing methods are used, a commercial grade dishwashing machine is required. Home style dishwashers are not acceptable. The machine must be operated in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. In addition to the dishwasher, a pre-wash sink must be located adjacent to the dishwashing machine for scraping and pre-washing. A hand wash sink must be provided in each utensil washing area. A water heater must be adequately sized to serve the maximum demand of all plumbing fixtures.

Hand Washing Sinks: Hand washing facilities for employees must be provided at each food preparation area, food serving counter, utensil washing area, bar, and each wait station where food is portioned or drinks are prepared. Hand wash sinks must be constructed with non-hand operated controls and be equipped with hot and cold water, hand soap

dispensers, and single service towels. It is important to provide plans to the health department with the locations of all hand sinks before any construction is started to assure the proper number of hand wash sinks are provided. Large food establishments will require multiple hand washing sinks to allow for convenience. Existing food establishments may be required to install additional hand sinks to meet the current health codes.

Food Preparation Sink: A food preparation sink is required in food establishments that wash produce items or thaw food under running water. The sink must be connected to the sewer through an air gap installed in compliance with the Wisconsin plumbing code. This sink can only be used for food preparation and no other purpose such as hand washing, dumping mop water, or soaking dirty utensils and rags.

Utility Cleaning Facility (mop sink): A utility sink or curbed cleaning fixture with floor drain must be provided and used for cleaning mops and disposing of wastewater. The sink must be located in a location that will not contaminate food, beverages, ice machines, food/ice utensils and other equipment.

Floors, Walls and Ceilings: The floors in kitchens, food storage, food display, salad bars, beverage dispensing, bars, restrooms and utensil washing areas shall be constructed of smooth, durable, easily cleanable material such as commercial vinyl tile, quarry tile or epoxy-coated cement. Carpet, carpet mats, and absorbent wood floors are not acceptable in these high moisture areas. A sealed water-tight base coving between the wall and floor is required (minimum 4 inches high). Walls and ceilings must be light colored, smooth, nonabsorbent and easily cleanable. Walls may be constructed of drywall, plaster or glazed cinderblock, sealed with washable paint or be covered with ceramic tile, steel or non-porous material such as FRP (fiberglass reinforced panels). Acceptable **ceilings** include painted drywall, plaster, or rigid smooth vinyl-covered commercial kitchen ceiling tiles. Acoustic tiles are not permitted. All utility lines for electrical, gas, plumbing and ventilation must be concealed when located in food preparation, serving and display areas to allow for easy cleaning. Studs, joists and rafters must not be exposed wood.

Lighting: All overhead lights must be shielded or the bulbs must be listed as "shatter resistant" in the following areas; food preparation, food storage, food serving, food display, utensil washing and above bar sinks, ice chests, and ice machines. There must be at least 50 foot-candles of light in food preparation and utensil washing areas.

Food Equipment: All equipment that comes in contact with food, beverages or ice must meet the ANSI accredited equipment certification program (labeled with NSF or other ANSI sanitation certification), or have the approval of the Wisconsin Department of Health. Home-style equipment such as kitchen sinks, stoves, shelves, refrigerators, and dishwashers are not acceptable for commercial use. A thermometer must be located inside each refrigerator and freezer. Metal-stem thermometers or electronic thermocouples must be provided to measure internal food temperatures. Older ice bins with seamed interiors or plug holes are no longer approved and must be replaced with new units. Ice bins must be supplied with sliding covers. Beverage tubing and cold plates must not be installed in contact with ice inside bins. Beverage waste lines may not pass through ice bins or be located above ice bins. Backflow protection devices must be installed at each water supply connection for soda carbonators, chemical dispensers, mop sink faucets, and dishwashers. Food contact surfaces on equipment and prep tables shall be non-wood construction and meet National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) or other ANSI sanitation certification or be approved by the Wisconsin Department of Health. Wood is not allowed in walk in coolers, freezers or refrigerators and other areas that are humid or wet.

For more information on NSF equipment standards see this website.

http://www.nsf.org/business/food_equipment/standards.asp?program=FoodEqu

Grease Hood Systems: Where grease producing foods are cooked, ventilation hoods must be properly installed according to state building and fire codes. Hoods must be supplied with state approved fire suppression systems. All grease producing equipment must be located under the hood unless excluded by state law. Contact the Wisconsin Department of Commerce or the local building inspection department for more information.

Restrooms: Restrooms must be provided for customers and staff. Restrooms must have self-closing doors with gender designation signs and must be supplied with hot and cold water, soap dispensers, single service towels and sufficient number of fixtures based on occupancy. They must be located so it is not necessary for patrons to pass through food preparation, food storage, food dispensing or utensil washing areas. Toilets must be constructed with

elongated bowls, open-front seats and no lid. The number of restrooms and fixtures is set by the Wisconsin building code.

Certified Food Operator: At least one Person in Charge (PIC) of each food establishment shall be certified by the Wisconsin Department of Health as certified restaurant manager within 90 days of opening the business. The individual must pass a state approved examination and submit a certified manager application to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (608-266-2835). The certified manager is responsible for providing food sanitation training to employees and monitoring their health status and food handling practices.

Tavern:

Taverns may serve free popcorn, cheese, crackers, pretzels, cold sausage, cured fish or bread and butter without a restaurant license. 196.03(5)a. No meals may be served or sold to the general public. No food may be brought in from a restaurant or caterer and then be served or sold to the general public. La Crosse County requires taverns to obtain a tavern license from the Health Department.

Pre-packaged Restaurant:

Pre-packaged restaurant means a restaurant that serves only individually wrapped single food servings that are manufactured and packaged off-premise by a licensed processor. Preparation on the premise is limited to reheating and serving. State Law DHS 196.03(4m)

Examples: Frozen pizza cooked in a pizza toaster
Single prepackaged commercial sandwiches heated in a microwave

Restaurant:

Restaurant means any building, room or place where meals are prepared, served or sold to transients or the general public, and all places used in connection with the building, room or place. State Law DHS 196.03(5)

Catering:

Catering is the activity of providing food for a specific event at a location other than the licensed food establishment on a contractual, prearranged basis to a predefined subset of the general public, such as invited guests to a wedding or similar celebration, or to participants in an organized group or activity. Catering does not include the sale of individual meals directly to the consumer (this would require a restaurant license at that location). State Law DHS 196.03(1g).

Example: Invited guests to a wedding or similar celebration or participants in an organized group.

Additional Resources:

Department of Health Services, Madison, WI 608-266-2835

Department of Agriculture, Eau Claire, WI 715-839-3844

Department of Commerce, La Crosse, WI 608-785-9334

Wisconsin Food Code DHS chapter 196 Appendix can be found at local libraries and at this website:

http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin_code/atcp/75

Free food safety training materials are at www.safefoodcrew.org

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2/9/2012