



# Food Safety Guidelines **for Mobile Food Service**

***About this guide***

*This guide was prepared by Nova Scotia Environment to help operators of mobile food service units meet food safety requirements. The wording may differ from the laws and regulations referred to. When accuracy is critical, consult official sources.*

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Food Safety Guidelines for Mobile Food Service  
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# Requirements for mobile food service— and other things you need to know

Nova Scotia Environment—Inspection, Compliance and Enforcement Division—is responsible for the approval and inspection of mobile food service units. You may also need approvals or inspections or permits from other provincial or municipal authorities to operate within the law:

**Follow guidelines:** Follow these guidelines on the operational requirements of mobile food service units. Mobile food service units are **not** moveable restaurants—food preparation may be restricted.

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**Comply with regulations:** Comply with the Nova Scotia Food Safety Regulations: [novascotia.ca/just/regulations/regs/hpafood.html](http://novascotia.ca/just/regulations/regs/hpafood.html)

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**Obtain annual permit:** Obtain a food establishment permit from Nova Scotia Environment (NSE) prior to operation and annually. Permits are not transferrable.

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**Obtain vehicle inspection:** These self-contained, easily mobile units require a valid vehicle or trailer inspection through the Registry of Motor Vehicles under the Nova Scotia Motor Vehicle Act.

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**Submit plans:** Submit plans to the public health officer to assess the proposed unit for compliance within the regulations and guidelines.

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**Follow PHO direction:** Public health officers (PHOs) have the right to restrict activities or menu items on all mobile food service units. They are available for consultation: [novascotia.ca/nse/](http://novascotia.ca/nse/)

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**Temporary events?** These guidelines apply only to **mobile** food service units. Food Safety Guidelines for Temporary Events set out the minimum requirements for the service of foods on a temporary basis: [novascotia.ca/nse/food-protection/docs/Food-Safety-Guidelines-Temporary-Events.pdf](http://novascotia.ca/nse/food-protection/docs/Food-Safety-Guidelines-Temporary-Events.pdf)

# Definitions

**Base of Operation:** A location where food storage, chemical storage, and cleaning for the mobile food service unit are carried out.

Also known as a commissary.

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**Mobile Food Service Unit:** A self-contained mobile unit, such as a vehicle or cart, from which food intended for public consumption is prepared/processed and/or served to the public with or without charge.

A mobile food service unit is **not** a moveable restaurant—food preparation may be restricted.

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**Self-contained:** This means that all equipment and surfaces required for the processing, storage, and display of food products are either contained within or physically attached and are part of the whole unit.

# Classifications of mobile food service units

## **Class 1:**

### **Extended Menu**

A self-contained, fully enclosed mobile food service unit that is capable of supporting the processing, preparation, and distribution of food products.

Usually a vehicle.

May be approved for minimal to extensive food handling based on construction and equipment, such as refrigerated storage, sinks, water and wastewater supply.

A base of operation may be required or recommended.

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## **Class 2:**

### **Limited Handling / Restricted Menu**

A self-contained mobile food service unit that is used for the dispensing of food and/or drinks.

Not intended to be used for the preparation of food—like cutting, chopping, mixing, stuffing.

Cooking of raw protein is not permitted.

May be a cart or a vehicle; carts must have overhead protection.

A base of operation is required.

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## **Class 3:**

### **Raw Meat / Raw Fish Vendor**

A self-contained mobile food service unit from which only whole or packaged approved meat or fish are sold.

A base of operation is recommended.

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## **Exempt:**

### ***Units are exempt from the guidelines if they only:***

- dispense non-potentially hazardous pre-packaged foods
- prepare and dispense unpackaged, non-potentially hazardous foods, such as popcorn and cotton candy
- dispense commercially pre-packaged ice cream products

**Table 1: Summary of Requirements Based on Mobile Classification**

Proposed Mobile Type	Food Handling Activities	Permit (Y/N)	Number of Utensil Washing Sinks	Handwashing Sink	Potable Water Tank Capacity (litres)	Food Handler Training	Base of Operation
<b>Exempt</b>	Units that dispense non-potentially hazardous pre-packaged foods or prepare and dispense unpackaged, non-potentially hazardous foods, such as popcorn and cotton candy, or units that dispense commercially pre-packaged ice cream products.	N	0  (units that dispense only pre-packaged foods do not require sinks)	Recommend	Recommend 36L  (units that dispense only pre-packaged foods do not require water)	Recommend	Recommend
<b>Class 1</b>	Units that prepare and dispense any type of food and any level of food handling, including products with raw proteins (Examples: burger/fish & chip bus, full-menu mobile, ice cream unit, smoothies, etc.)	Y	2 or 3  (number of sinks to be determined, by foods and level of preparation, in consultation with a PHO)	Required  (separate handwashing sink required)	130 L	Required	Recommend  (may be required based on level of preparation and storage requirements, in consultation with a PHO)
<b>Class 2</b>	Units that dispense and prepare low risk foods such as, mini-donuts and nachos OR units that dispense unpackaged hot and cold foods and beverages. Units that dispense pre-packaged potentially hazardous foods. Units that dispense potentially hazardous foods such as hot dogs, commercially precooked hamburgers. The cooking of raw proteins (e.g., meat/poultry) is PROHIBITED. This type of unit permits very limited or no food preparation.	Y	1  (sink requirement depends on food served, may be combined for handwashing, requires approval from PHO)	Required  (units that dispense only pre-packaged foods do not require sinks)	36 L  (units that dispense only pre-packaged foods do not require water)	Required	Required
<b>Class 3</b>	Units that dispense whole or pre-portioned packaged approved meat, fish, and seafood (excluding lobster)	Y	0	0	0	Recommend	Recommend

**Class 1 - Extended Menu.** These units are typically vehicles; self-contained units with refrigerated storage, sinks, water and wastewater supply. These units can be approved for minimal to extensive food handling.

**Class 2 - Limited Food Handling, Dispensing or Restricted Menu.** These units can be carts or vehicles. Cooking of raw protein is not permitted. No food preparation such as cutting, chopping, mixing or stuffing of food is allowed. Overhead protection is required for carts.

**Class 3 - Raw Meat / Raw Fish**

# Base of Operation

## About a base of operation

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**Need:** A base of operation is required for

- some Class 1 mobile food service units
- all Class 2 mobile food service units (see Table 1)

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**Exceptions:** The public health officer may determine that a self-contained mobile unit has the ability to operate without a base of operation if the unit contains all the space, equipment, and utensils that the base of operation would provide.

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**No permit required:** A base of operation is not required to be permitted as no food preparation is to be carried out at this location.

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**Approvals:** Garages may be acceptable.

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## Requirements of a base of operation

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***A base of operation must***

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**Refrigeration:** Be equipped with mechanical refrigeration for potentially hazardous foods.

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**Safe storage:** Have adequate safe storage for food and equipment.

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**Dishwashing:** Be supplied with hot and cold potable water if used for dishwashing purposes by a mobile food service unit. The unit must return to the base each day to wash, rinse, and sanitize equipment and utensils.

**Potable water:** Have access to a potable water supply for filling the mobile food service unit water storage tank—or must document the source of the potable water.

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**Wastewater disposal:** Have access to wastewater disposal to empty the mobile food service unit wastewater tank—or must document where the wastewater is disposed of (location or locations).

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**Fuel storage areas:** Store propane tanks, gas tanks, and generators away from food storage areas.

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**Unit storage:** Be able to store a mobile food service unit that is not fully self-enclosed (with floor, walls, ceiling). When this is not possible, the unit must be either

- stored in a structure that protects it from contamination and damage
- covered with a washable, waterproof cover (like vinyl)

# General requirements of a mobile food service unit

## ***A mobile food service unit must***

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**Construction materials:** Be constructed of smooth, non-absorbent, and easily cleanable materials. Interior food contact surfaces **must not** be constructed of wood.

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**Sealed joints:** Be constructed in such a manner that all joints are fully sealed.

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**Refrigeration units:** Be capable of maintaining potentially hazardous foods at a temperature of 4°C (40°F) or below at all times.

Be equipped with an accurate indicating thermometer.

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**Water supply:** Meet water guidelines (see Table 1), when a supply of water is required for the unit class:

- potable water
  - from an approved source
  - in sufficient volume for the class
  - of sufficient temperature and pressure
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**Water source:** Draw potable water from a single source, without needing to switch tanks.

Use connections, hoses, and pipes that meet the requirements for use with potable water.

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**Water sampling:** Sample water from private water supplies that will be used for food preparation or hand washing:

- before opening for the season, if seasonal
- at least once a year or, if operation is continuous
- whenever required by the public health officer

Submit water samples to an accredited laboratory for analysis.

<b>Wastewater:</b>	<p>Have acceptable wastewater collection.</p> <p>Dispose of wastewater into a municipal or other approved wastewater collection system.</p> <p>Store wastewater in a tank that is 15% larger than the potable water storage tank.</p> <p>Have a drain suitably located in the wastewater tank to allow for easy draining into a wastewater collection system.</p>
<b>Tanks in transit:</b>	<p>Secure and fully enclose both potable water tanks and wastewater tanks during transit to prevent spills or movement.</p>
<b>Storage space:</b>	<p>Have adequate space within the unit to store all equipment and food being used—tanks, food storage containers, utensils, etc.</p> <p>Not store anything outside the unit—No exterior storage is permitted.</p>
<b>Unit design:</b>	<p>Be designed to protect foods and condiments from direct sunlight and potential contaminants.</p>
<b>Garbage:</b>	<p>Have suitable garbage receptacles with tight-fitting covers.</p> <p>Remove garbage often enough to prevent odours and conditions that attract pests.</p> <p>Dispose of all waste in an approved manner.</p>
<b>Power supply:</b>	<p>Be equipped with a quick disconnect that does not require the services of an electrician, if using an exterior power supply.</p>
<b>Deep fryers:</b>	<p>Use deep fryers only when three conditions are met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the vehicle is enclosed</li> <li>• the vehicle is equipped with a proper exhaust system</li> <li>• the exhaust system has been approved by the appropriate regulatory authority</li> </ul>
<b>Frozen treats:</b>	<p>Be equipped with dipper wells or scoops that are cleaned and sanitized after each use, if serving frozen dairy or dairy substitute products NOT pre-packaged for single service.</p> <p>Have a potable water supply of at least 130 litres, if using a dipper well.</p>

# Requirements for food protection

## ***Food sources and safe food handling practices***

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### **Food (ice)**

All food, including ice, must be

- from approved sources
  - protected from contamination at all times
  - prepared in a permitted facility—food prepared in a home kitchen is not permitted
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### **Meat sources:**

All meats must be from a federally or NS provincially inspected facility.

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### **Food serving practices:**

A suitable barrier between hand and food must be used when serving to the public: such as clean disposable gloves, napkins, or tongs.

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### **Unit cleanliness:**

The mobile food service unit must be maintained in a clean and sanitary manner at all times.

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### **Single-use only:**

All items used by the public must be single service only—plates, bowls, cutlery, etc.

Re-use of single-service items is prohibited.

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### **Self-serve condiments:**

Self-serve condiments must be either

- offered in individual packages
  - dispensed from a container that protects the condiment from contamination
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### **Work surface wipes:**

Work surface wipes must be either

- disposable articles
- cloths that are stored in sanitizing solution and laundered daily

# Requirements for personnel

***Everyone who works within a mobile food service unit must***

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**Food handler certificate:** Hold a valid certificate for the successful completion of a food handler training program recognized by the NSE:

- required for Class 1
- required for Class 2
- recommended for Class 3
- recommended for exempt units

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**Cleanliness:** Be clean

Wear only clean clothing

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**Hand washing:** Wash hands after

- taking a break
- using the washroom
- sneezing
- handling soiled articles

Wash hands before resuming

- food service activities
- food handling

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**Smoking/vaping:** Refrain from smoking or vaping

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**Hair:** Keep hair from contaminating food:

- wear hair covering
- confine hair in a manner that keeps it away from food

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**Illness:** Not work when ill with

- symptoms of fever, vomiting, diarrhea
- cold/flu like symptoms

# Requirements based on classification

## **CLASS 1:** **Extended Menu**

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### **Movable:**

The unit must be able to be moved to meet the definition of a mobile food service unit.

The unit may not be moved with the assistance of a tow truck, flatbed, or any other similar commercial vehicle.

If not able to be moved, the unit must be permitted as a permanent food establishment.

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### **Exhaust system:**

Walls, ceiling, equipment, and occupants must be protected from grease by the installation of a powered exhaust canopy, filters, and appropriate duct work to exhaust cooking odours, gases, fumes, and grease laden air from the cooking area.

The exhaust system must be approved by the appropriate Regulatory Authority.

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### **No interior seating/washrooms:**

Units with interior seating for customers or customer washrooms are not considered mobile food service units and would be required to meet the conditions of a permanent permitted food establishment.

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### **Refrigeration:**

Mechanical refrigeration must be provided and capable of maintaining foods at 4°C(40°F) or less, and in the case of frozen foods at -18°C (0°F). Coolers with ice packs are not an acceptable means of refrigeration on a Class 1 unit.

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### **Potable water:**

A single potable water storage tank must be provided:

- with the capacity of at least 130 litres
- capable of providing a constant pressure of water to the fixtures

A tank installed at a higher elevation (flowing under gravity feed) will suffice, though some situations may require water to be mechanically pumped. The adequacy of water pressure will be determined by the public health officer.

Only potable water may be stored on the unit.

**Water heating:** A water heating unit capable of providing water to the sinks at a temperature of not less than 45°C (113°F) for washing and sanitizing purposes is required.

Approved chemical sanitizer will also be required as part of the sanitizing process.

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**Wastewater storage:** A wastewater storage tank with a capacity of at least 15% greater than the vehicles potable water storage tank is required.

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**Utensil washing sink:** At least one two-compartment sink is required for the washing and sanitizing of utensils:

- the two-compartment sink must be of sufficient size and volume to handle the level of food preparation within the mobile food service unit
- the public health officer may require additional sinks, depending on the level of food preparation within the mobile food service unit

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**Hand washing sink:** A hand washing sink for the use of staff must be provided:

- supplied with liquid soap
- supplied with single-service towels in dispensers
- used solely for the purpose of hand washing

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**Screened openings:** All openings to the outside must be screened or fitted with other devices to repel or prevent the entrance of flies, insects, and vermin—except when foods are being served through a serving window.

Insects or vermin must not be present in the mobile unit.

## CLASS 2:

## Limited Handling / Restricted Menu

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**Forbidden foods:**

***Raw meats or other perishable foods that are not-ready-to-eat are not permitted on Class 2 units.***

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**Submit plans:**

All Class 2 units that are self-constructed must submit plans to the public health officer for prior approval. These units can be carts or vehicles.

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**Foods restricted:**

Foods sold from Class 2 units must be either

- non-potentially hazardous foods or
- commercially prepared and pre-cooked ready-to-eat foods

With approval from the public health officer, permitted food establishments that own a Class 2 unit may pre-cook foods and offer them for sale at the mobile food service unit.

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**Forbidden activities:**

Activities not permitted on Class 2 units:

- the preparation of fresh juices/smoothies
  - the scooping of ice cream
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**Refrigeration:**

Mechanical refrigeration is preferred—propane, battery, or generator.

An accurate indicating thermometer is required in the refrigeration unit or cooler.

Ice or gelled ice packs in insulated containers are acceptable provided the foods are maintained at 4°C (40°F) or below.

When gelled ice packs or ice are used for temperature control:

- Ice must be obtained from an approved source
- Foods must be completely surrounded
- Foods must be kept in tight, waterproof containers
- Foods must not be in direct contact with ice or water
- Coolers should have a drain to allow for draining of ice water

<b>Unpackaged foods:</b>	<p>A mobile food service unit on which unpackaged potentially hazardous foods are handled or heated must have</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a supply of potable running water in a suitable holding tank of at least 36 litres</li> <li>• a hand wash sink equipped with liquid soap and paper towel</li> <li>• wastewater storage 15% larger than the potable supply container</li> </ul>
<b>Pre-packaged foods only:</b>	<p>A mobile food service unit that sells only pre-packaged potentially hazardous foods (such as a self-service vending vehicle) may address hand washing using moist disposable wipe and alcohol hand sanitizers (60–70% alcohol).</p>
<b>Reusable utensils:</b>	<p>Reusable utensils must be replaced every two hours with clean, sanitized utensils—tongs, spoons, spatulas, etc.</p> <p>Food grade containers must be provided for the separate storage of dirty and clean utensils to prevent cross contamination.</p> <p>Dirty utensils must be returned to the base of operation for washing and sanitizing.</p>
<b>Overhead cover:</b>	<p>The mobile food service unit must have an overhead cover to protect food from weather elements and the risk of contamination from birds.</p>
<b>Food covers:</b>	<p>All food must be protected by means of covers or packaging or by enclosure.</p>
<b>Ice chest storage:</b>	<p>An ice chest may be stored off the cart when two conditions are met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it is used only for the storage of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– extra ice</li> <li>– extra gelled ice packs</li> <li>– non-perishable beverages in their original containers</li> </ul> </li> <li>• it is kept at least 15 centimetres (6 inches) off the ground</li> </ul>

## CLASS 3:

## Raw Meat / Raw Fish Vendor

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*The department limits the type of meat, meat products, fish and fish products that can be sold from a mobile food service unit.*

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**Disposable gloves:**

A suitable barrier between hand and food must be used— such as clean disposable gloves.

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**Covers for raw foods:**

All raw meats / raw fish must be protected by means of covers or packaging or by enclosure.

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**Sanitizer:**

Commercial sanitizer must be available for cleaning and sanitizing surfaces.

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**Hand cleaning:**

Hand cleaning can be maintained through the use of single use, moist disposable wipes plus an alcohol hand sanitizer (60–70% alcohol).

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***Mobile Raw Meat Vendor:***

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**No on-site processing:**

No processing is permitted on site—“processing” includes activities like cutting. A mobile food service unit that processes meat must have a Class 1 permit.

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**Refrigeration required:**

Meats must be displayed in adequate, mechanically refrigerated units. These units must be sanitarily maintained and equipped with an accurate indicating thermometer to ensure meats are kept at 4°C (40°F) or below.

## ***Mobile Raw Fish Vendor:***

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**Regulatory compliance:** The sale of all fish and fish products must comply with requirements of the Regulatory Authority.

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**No on-site processing:** No processing is permitted on site—"processing" includes activities like filleting. A mobile food service unit that processes fish must have a Class 1 permit.

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**Refrigeration required:** All units must have refrigeration facilities capable of maintaining foods at a temperature of 4°C (40°F) or less.

Mechanical refrigeration is preferred—using propane, battery, or generator.

Other refrigeration methods may be used but must maintain the foods at 4°C (40°F) or below—using ice or gelled ice packs in insulated containers.

When gelled ice packs or ice are used for temperature control:

- Ice must be obtained from an approved source.
- Fish, shellfish, or fish products must be completely surrounded.
- Fish, shellfish, and fish products must be kept in tight, waterproof containers.
- Fish, shellfish, or fish products must not be in direct contact with accumulated water.
- An accurate indicating thermometer must be present in the refrigeration unit.
- Coolers should have a drain to allow for the draining of ice water.

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**Hand cleaning:** Hand cleaning can be maintained through the use of single use, moist disposable wipes plus an alcohol hand sanitizer (60–70% alcohol).