



# CATAWBA COUNTY

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Public Health

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## **Environmental Health Ensuring Food Safety During Festivals**

Hot dogs, BBQ, hamburgers, fried turkey legs, and sausages are just a few food options that are commonly associated with outdoor festivals. The tempting smell can have anyone's taste buds watering. But when you purchase your food, how do you know that what you are eating is safe? Just as you look for a restaurant's sanitation grade, you should look for the stand's permit before ordering. Temporary food establishments are required to be inspected and permitted prior to serving the public.

Catawba County Public Health's Environmental Health Division is responsible for permitting temporary food establishments, push carts and mobile food units. Environmental Health Specialists work around the clock to make sure that the food that you are eating is safe. Typically, they permit over a hundred temporary food establishments a year, and they often see the same food vendor more than once in a year. Temporary food establishments must be permitted at each festival that they attend.

A temporary food establishment in place for 15 days or less must operate in conjunction with a fair, festival, carnival, or similar event. Temporary food establishments may not operate at places such as flea markets and farmers markets, as those are considered continuing business entities which are in place week after week as defined by the North Carolina Office of the Attorney General. Environmental Health Specialists often must close traveling vendors who set up there, in parking lots or along the roadside. The sale of food at these places and other locations requires a permit for a mobile food unit or push cart for which the requirements are much more stringent, and those units must operate in conjunction with a permitted foodservice establishment.

"Making sure that the food served is safe and wholesome is our primary concern. The food handling procedures and construction of temporary food establishments are not robust enough to allow operation for more than a short period of time, and pose special concerns for food safety. Our inspectors ensure that each stand meets all the requirements and has the necessary equipment to store, handle, prepare and serve food safely. Also, our staff visits each stand every day of operation to be certain that those standards are being maintained," explained Scott Carpenter, the Food, Lodging and Institutional Supervisor for Catawba County Public Health's Environmental Health Division.



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Before the event takes place, vendors must apply for a Temporary Food Stand Permit and submit \$50 to Environmental Health no less than one week before the first day of anticipated operation. Event organizers also have a role in informing food vendors about the application process and submitting a list of approved food vendors to Environmental Health. Representatives from Environmental Health will be on site to issue permits before vendors start selling food and continue to monitor operations during events. This helps to ensure that vendors are storing and cooking food appropriately, meeting the requirements set forth by North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Some vendors that operate at festivals and similar events are unregulated, however. Non-profit organizations such as churches and volunteer rescue squads that are exempt from state and federal income tax can utilize an exemption in the General Statutes allowing them to operate no more than once per month for no more than two consecutive days without being permitted. Environmental Health Specialists consult with these groups and provide information in order to ensure that they are aware of proper food safety techniques, and encourage them to meet the same standards as permitted establishments. Also, some foods, such as ice cream, funnel cakes, cotton candy, and apple pies are not regulated under the foodservice rules, and do not require permitting.

The extra precaution is appreciated by festival goers as well.

“It’s great to know that the food that we are eating is safe and that Public Health is looking out for us. The last thing that I want is to go to a festival and get sick from the hot dog that I decided to eat,” said Mike Pearson, a local Hickory Alive attendee.

To learn more about how Environmental Health is working to protect citizens at festivals or about the temporary vendor permitting process please visit the Environmental Health website at [www.catawbacountync.gov/phealth/ehmain.asp](http://www.catawbacountync.gov/phealth/ehmain.asp) or by calling Environmental Health at 828-465-8270.



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