

Environmental Health Division

Food Truck Round Up: Optimizing Inspections

OVERVIEW: Placer County health inspectors host an accessible annual event, the Food Truck Round Up, to ensure food safety and assist food truck operators with compliance.

CHALLENGE: Our challenge is to complete all annual mobile food facility (MFF) inspections in June, prior to permits expiring each year in a convenient and efficient manner for our inspectors and our vendors. Food trucks are part of a growing mobile-food industry. Food prepared away from brick and mortar restaurants presents challenges our inspectors help operators solve. Previously, MFF inspections were by appointment only at our office located in North Auburn. However, the majority of our permitted MFF vendors are based in Sacramento County or South Placer, which is about 30 miles from our Auburn office. The uphill drive to Auburn sometimes results in vehicles overheating or breaking down which creates last-minute cancellations. The distance to Auburn also led to scheduling challenges and was resource intensive to manage. The office-based inspection format resulted in lost inspector and MFF vendor time and did not advance our goal of completing inspections to ensure food safety.

SOLUTION: Hold an inspection/permitting event for multiple MFF vendors to complete their annual inspection at a community-based, accessible location that is efficient for inspectors and convenient for MFF vendors.

INNOVATION: The Food Truck Round Up is administered at two locations (Auburn and South Placer) over the three days. The South Placer site, a parking lot at a local junior college, is closer to the Sacramento valley and is conveniently located near Interstate 80. Regular classes at the college are not in session in June, offering an area with plenty of space for multiple large vehicles, like food trucks, to assemble. Should an inspection reveal action needed, this accessible location allows MFF vendors from the valley to make equipment repairs and replacements more quickly because they are closer to their base of operations where they may have tools or back-up equipment. Additionally, there are more food equipment suppliers in the South Placer area if they require a professional repair or need to buy replacement items. As an example, a past vendor's generator would not start, which meant the refrigerator would not run, which would result in a failed inspection. The vendor was able to leave the event and return later the same day with a working generator, and the truck passed inspection. If this had happened during a scheduled inspection at our Auburn office, the

vendor would have had to return another day, which would have consumed significantly more time for the vendor and the inspector. Because the event has multiple inspectors on hand, we are able to assign a diverse group including Spanish-speaking staff to meet the linguistic needs of vendors. Most inspections at this event take between 20 and 40 minutes. Our goal is for every vendor to pass the inspection, therefore inspectors work closely with vendors, so those with issues can come back by day three and demonstrate they made the necessary repairs or replacements and ultimately pass the inspection. Vendors receive notice of the Food Truck Round Up with their invoice each year. For new vendors, inspectors work with them to complete the necessary paperwork and submit the permit fee in advance, so they can also receive an inspection at this event to start operating in July.

RESULTS: Over the course of the first four years of implementation, an average of 30 percent of annual MFF inspections take place at the South Placer-based event. Vendors have experience reduced drive times of about 50 minutes, for a total of 122 hours saved to date. Similarly, inspectors save time scheduling, waiting on no shows and rescheduling the inspections. Also, inspecting many food trucks assembled at one location, as opposed to one at a time, is more efficient. We estimate the Food Truck Round Up saves inspectors about 30 minutes per inspection for a total of 73 hours saved to date. This is nearly 200 hours of time saved for vendors and inspectors since the event began. Despite our success, we feel we can increase the number annual inspections at the South Placer site through increased outreach via social media, resulting in a greater reduction of inspector time.

REPLICABILITY: Our program saves time for inspectors, and vendors appreciate the option of traveling a shorter distance and improved customer service. It is especially beneficial if a jurisdiction has areas of more concentrated population, where most of the food-truck activity occurs, and if their physical office is far away or located near terrain that is difficult for food trucks to travel over. Key steps include entering into an agreement with a suitable location and sending notices of the event with annual permit renewal invoices. Attached please find a sample of our vendor letter and event flier.

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OPTIONAL SUBMISSION: [Link to video from our first Food Truck Round Up in 2017, pictures from Food Truck Round Up inspections, an event flier and a sample letter sent to vendors.](#)