

*La Crosse County Health Department*  
*300 4<sup>th</sup> St. N.*  
*La Crosse, WI 54601*  
*608-785-9872*

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

**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 HFS 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 and Family Services by calling 608-266-2835. The food code is on the internet at [www.safefoodcrew.org](http://www.safefoodcrew.org). Wisconsin building, zoning and fire codes apply to food establishments and taverns and are enforced by other government agencies. Contact your local city, village or town government for additional information on building code requirements and inspections. All tavern and 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-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 30. These fees are based upon the type of beverage or food provided to the public. 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 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 showing the location of all plumbing fixtures, equipment, seating, and restrooms to the district sanitarian at La Crosse County Health Department, 300 4<sup>th</sup> St. North, La Crosse, WI 54601. Phone: 608-785-9872, FAX 608-785-9846. **Existing businesses that are sold almost always need new equipment and structural upgrades before licenses can be issued to a new operator. Health codes are frequently updated and prospective operators must meet the most current laws. It is important to discuss your plan with the district sanitarian as early as possible to avoid delays in opening the business!**

The following is a summary of some of the major points covered in the Appendix of the Wisconsin Administrative Code, Chapters HFS 196 Restaurants or Chapter ATCP 75 Retail Food Establishments. 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 UL Sanitation is required. The sink must be constructed with drainboards on each end. 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 are used, a commercial grade utensil washing machine is required. Home style dishwashers are not acceptable. The machine must be operated in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. In addition, a pre-wash sink must be located adjacent to the dishwashing machine for scraping and pre-washing. A handwash sink must be provided in every utensil washing area. A water heater must be sized to the maximum use demand of all plumbing facilities.

**Handwashing Facilities:** Handwashing facilities for employees must be provided at each food preparation area, food serving counter, utensil washing area, bar, and wait station where food is portioned. Handwash 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 handsinks before any construction is started to assure the proper number of handwash sinks are provided. Large food preparation areas will require multiple handwashing sinks. It is very expensive to change plumbing once construction has begun so submit your plans early. Older food establishments may be required to install additional handsinks.

**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. This sink can only be used for food preparation and no other purpose such as handwashing or soaking dirty utensils and rags.

**Utility Cleaning Facility (mop sink):** A utility sink or curbed cleaning fixture with a 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, or clean utensils and equipment.

**Floors, Walls and Ceilings:** The floors in food preparation, 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 sealed cement. Carpet, carpet mats, and absorbent wood floors are not acceptable in these areas. A watertight, impervious coved base 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 cement block, sealed with washable paint or sealant or be covered with ceramic tile, steel or equivalent non-porous material such as FRP (fiberglass reinforced panels). Acceptable treatments for ceilings include painted drywall, plaster or rigid vinyl-covered commercial ceiling panels. Acoustic tiles are not permitted. Work surfaces and prep tables shall be non-wood construction and NSF or UL Sanitation certified or equivalent. No wood is allowed in walk in coolers, freezers or refrigerators. All utility lines for electrical, plumbing and ventilation must be concealed when located in food preparation, serving and display areas.

**Lighting:** All lights must be shielded when located in food preparation, food storage, food serving, food display, and utensil washing areas. Lights above bar sinks, ice chests and ice machines must be shielded. There must be 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 UL SANITATION), 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. There must be a thermometer 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 in 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 sinks and dishwashers.

**Grease Hood Systems:** Where grease producing foods are cooked, ventilation hoods must be properly installed according to state 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. If seating is available for more than 15 people, at least 2 public restrooms are required. 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 serving or utensil washing areas. Toilets must be constructed with elongated bowls, open-front seats and no lid.

**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 & Family Services. The certified manager is responsible for training employees in food safety practices before they work with food.

**Additional Resources:**

WI Department of Health Services, Madison, WI 608-266-2835
WI Department of Agriculture, Eau Claire, WI 715-839-3844
WI Department of Commerce, La Crosse, WI 608-785-9334

Wisconsin Food Code Appendix can be found at [www.safefoodcrew.org](http://www.safefoodcrew.org) and at local libraries.

Free food safety training for you and your staff [www.safefoodcrew.org](http://www.safefoodcrew.org)

**Tavern:**

Taverns may serve free popcorn, cheese, crackers, pretzels, cold sausage, cured fish or bread and butter. 196.03(5)a.

Example: No meals can be served or sold to the general public.

No food can be brought in from a restaurant or caterer and be served or sold by the tavern to the public

**Pre-packaged Restaurant:**

Pre-packaged restaurant means a restaurant that serves only individually wrapped single food servings that are prepared and packaged off-premise by a licensed processor with preparation on the premise limited to heating and serving. State Law HFS 196.03(4m)

Example: Frozen pizza cooked in a pizza toaster

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 and includes any public or private school lunchroom for which food service is provided by contract. State Law HFS 196.03(5)

Example: Assembling hot or cold sandwiches

Preparing and cooking pizza

Holding soup hot in a crock

Operating a hot dog steamer or roller

Making salads

Preparing food involving a number of steps

Self-service food bar

**Catering:**

Catering is the activity of providing food for a specific event at a location other than the licensed restaurant 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. State Law HFS 196.03(1g).

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

CALL LA CROSSE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT AT 608-785-9872 BEFORE YOU PURCHASE OR LEASE ANY FOOD SERVICE FACILITY. SAVE MONEY, PLAN AHEAD.

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