

Countywide Services Agency

Environmental Management
Department
Val F. Siebal, Director



Steven C. Szalay,
Interim County Executive

Bruce Wagstaff,
Interim Administrator

County of Sacramento

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Contact: Kelly McCoy, Supervising Environmental Specialist
(916) 875-8414
(916) 591-2932 (cell)

MEDIA ADVISORY

Food from Unpermitted Mobile Vendors Pose Health Risks

Sacramento County Kicks-off Public Awareness Campaign

You can find street vendors peddling fruit cups, berries, melons, roasted corn cobs, homemade tamales, and other foods throughout Sacramento. But is the food safe to eat? How would you know?

The Department of Environmental Management (EMD), who also inspects Sacramento restaurants for food safety, estimates there are hundreds of unpermitted mobile food vendors throughout the County, and the numbers are increasing. "With the downturn in the economy, many people are looking for a way to make ends meet, and often a food cart seems like a quick and easy way to earn additional income," said John Rogers, Environmental Health Division Chief. "Vendors are showing up in front of schools, at parks during league events, and outside churches."

So what is the problem? Food prepared and sold by unpermitted food vendors may not be kept hot or cold enough; vendors may not have hot water, soap, and paper towels to wash their hands or utensils; and they do not have access to a restroom. Many foods, including cut fruit, can grow bacteria such as Salmonella if not kept at temperatures below 41° F. Hot foods such as tamales and roasted corn must be kept at 135° F or hotter. "Lack of a hand wash sink means unwashed hands, and unwashed hands are the leading cause of food contamination," said Rogers.

EMD has launched a summer campaign to raise public awareness about possible health risks associated with consuming contaminated food purchased from unpermitted vendors. EMD urges everyone to look for the EMD permit sticker before buying food or produce from vendors. The sticker indicates the vendor has been inspected and is aware of proper food health and safety practices. The 2010 sticker is green.

If you see an unpermitted mobile vendor in the same location more than once, call EMD at (916) 875-8440 or email foodprogram@sacounty.net to report it. Be sure to include the time of day and location where the vendor can be found.

Remember: Look for a Sacramento County permit sticker. If in doubt, keep walking. It is not worth the risk!

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Visit EMD's website at www.emd.sacounty.net.