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Contra Costa County Environmental Health Placarding System

Contra Costa County uses a color-coded placarding system to publicly report the results of food safety inspections and food safety practices at fixed retail food facilities. Mobile food facilities (e.g., food trucks) that prepare, cook, or heat food also receive a placard at the conclusion of a field inspection.

Placarding requirements apply to all retail food facilities except cottage food operations, vending machines, temporary food events, certified farmers' markets, and farm stands. The green, yellow, and red placards are issued and posted by Contra Costa Environmental Health and are intended to help customers easily understand a business's food safety record and raise awareness about critical food safety risk factors.



Additional Ways to Learn About a Retail Food Facility

Anyone can request to see a copy of a facility's most recent inspection report from the facility by asking the operator.

You can also find inspection reports for fixed and mobile facilities at the Environmental Health website: <https://hsmobile.cchealth.org/ffinspectionsearch/Default.aspx>

Or by using the Contra Costa County's Food Inspector App:
<https://cchealth.org/eh/food/smartphone-app.php>

Placards

Placard colors are based on any food safety concerns found by an Environmental Health inspector at the time of the last inspection (routine or re-placarding inspection). The placard contains the date of the inspection and the date/color of the previous inspection. Food safety concerns are related to critical risk factors such as employee hygiene, food temperatures, cross-contamination, or pest infestations.

For fixed facilities, the placard is usually posted near the main entrance, facing outward, or at the point of sale. Mobile food facilities post the placard on the service-side window. Only Environmental Health staff may legally post, remove, or move placards at a fixed food facility. Tampering may result in a fine, suspension, or revocation of an operator's permit. A mobile food facility must post its placard when operating in Contra Costa County.

Any major problems found during an inspection must be corrected immediately, in the presence of the inspector, or the business must close until they are fixed (the health permit is suspended).

- **GREEN** means Pass
A green placard means that no more than one major violation was observed during the facility's most recent inspection (routine or re-placarding inspection).
- **YELLOW** means Conditional Pass
A yellow placard means that two or more major violations were observed during the facility's most recent inspection (routine or re-placarding inspection).
- **RED** means Closed
A red placard means the facility is closed because of food safety violations that pose immediate health hazard, such as a pest infestation, no water, sewage backup, no power, no hot water, etc., and the violation could not be immediately corrected.
- **PLACARD PENDING** means a fixed facility is new or has undergone a change of ownership and has not yet been inspected. A Placard Pending will also be posted when a closed facility reopens after correcting an imminent health hazard. A Placard Pending for a mobile food facility means a routine, unannounced inspection has not yet occurred in the calendar year.

Maintaining the placard is the permit holder's responsibility. If the placard is missing or altered, they must call 925-608-5500 within 24 hours to request a new one.

Re-Inspections

A permit holder with major violations must correct them while the inspector is present, or else close the facility (health permit suspension). A closed facility must be re-inspected before reopening.

Any facility that receives a Conditional Pass (Yellow) placard during a routine inspection will receive a replacarding inspection within 10 business days. If a Yellow placard is issued at the replacarding inspection, that placard will remain until the next scheduled routine inspection.

Operators will not be billed for their first re-placarding inspections (after a Yellow), or for their first re-inspections to verify compliance, of each permit year. Thereafter, re-inspections and replacarding inspections will be charged at Environmental Health's standard hourly rate.

Please note that verified complaints, reopening inspections after a permit suspension, and other work not related to placarding are charged at the hourly rate.

Inspection Criteria

Criteria used for placarding of fixed or mobile food facilities are described on the inspection report. They are based on the critical risk factors identified by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention to prevent foodborne illness.

Violation risk factors observed are summarized on the facility's placard, and the total number of major violations in these categories will determine its color. Certain violations will result in immediate closure of a food facility. A closed facility receives a Red placard and may not reopen until a subsequent re-inspection clears it to do so.

Repeat Violations

Permit holders that receive Yellow placards after inspection will receive on-site food safety education from their inspector and training materials, including a link to a "How to Get a Green" video. The video is available in several languages.

If a facility receives three consecutive Yellow placards or repeat critical violations or one or more health permit suspension, the permit holder will be invited to attend an administrative hearing. The purpose of this hearing is to give the operator the opportunity to explain why Environmental Health shouldn't proceed with enforcement action, such as a permit suspension or referral to the District Attorney's Office (DA). A representative of the DA's office may attend the hearing.

At the conclusion of the hearing, Environmental Health will either proceed with enforcement action or develop a hearing agreement. The hearing agreement is a list of agreed upon

expectations for the operator to meet and may include the operator arranging for onsite training by Environmental Health staff.

Administrative hearings may also be requested after permit suspensions or as otherwise determined by Environmental Health. **Other types of enforcement action can occur separate from the placarding system.**

Food Safety Excellence Awards

Food Safety Excellence Awards are issued yearly to food facilities that have demonstrated outstanding food safety and sanitation standards during their recent health inspections. The food establishments who qualify have passed at least three routine inspections during the past two years without any major violations.

To recognize the outstanding achievement these establishments have attained, recipients are awarded a special window decal to be displayed at their facility. Recipients will be notified by mail at the start of each year. Please look for these decals and join us in thanking these owners and operators for providing clean and safe food for the community.



Placarding Program – Retail Food FAQs

1. What is a retail food facility?

A Retail Food Facility includes any business or entity that sells or gives food (or beverage) to the public (e.g., customers, students, patients, inmates, homeless or needy). This includes restaurants, markets, farm stands, farmers' markets, bars, snack bars, school or staff cafeterias, detention facility kitchens, caterers, production kitchens, commissaries, cottage food, charitable feeding, temporary events (e.g., fairs, festivals), skilled nursing and hospital kitchens, and mobile food (food trucks, ice cream trucks, food carts).

2. What retail food facilities are subject to the placarding program?

Fixed facilities such as restaurants, markets, bars, snack bars, school or employee cafeterias, detention facility kitchens, caterers, productions kitchens, commissaries, charitable feeding.

Mobile facilities except those selling only whole uncut produce, prepackaged ice cream, or prepackaged non-potentially hazardous food items.

3. What is the Placarding Program?

The Contra Costa County Placarding Program is a grading system used to inform customers about a retail facility's compliance with critical risk factors. The placard color indicates the facility's score:

GREEN:	No more than one major critical risk factor violation was found.
YELLOW:	Two or more major critical risk factor violations were found.
RED:	A critical risk factor was found and unable to be immediately corrected. The health permit is suspended and the facility cannot operate until the problem is corrected and Environmental Health conducts a reinspection to verify the problem is fixed.

4. What is a “critical risk factor”?

Critical risk factors involve things that can result in harm to consumes, either by illness or injury. Examples include, handwashing, cross-contamination, food temperatures, cooking of animal products (meats, seafood, eggs), reheating or cooling foods, food sources, water supply, sewage disposal, and pest control.

5. Where are placards posted?

The placard is posted prominently at a customer entrance and affixed with tamper-proof tape.

6. If a facility gets a YELLOW placard, what happens next?

A follow-up inspection is conducted within 10 business days. If the facility has one or fewer major critical violations, a GREEN placard is awarded. If there are two or more major critical violations, the YELLOW placard remains in place pending the results of the next routine inspection.

7. Can repeated violations result in enforcement action other than the placard color?

Yes. A single egregious violation or repeated noncompliance can result in Environmental Health taking enforcement action against a retail food facility. Enforcement actions include reinspection fees, administrative hearing, permit suspension, permit revocation, or referral to the District Attorney's Office.