

Restaurant Emergency Operations Plans



Businesses, including restaurants and other food establishments, have been severely impacted by Hurricane Helene, but they are eager to reopen. State and local public health staff are here to help businesses accomplish the important goal of reopening and helping to feed their communities.

In ideal times, restaurants leverage trusted sources of drinking water, rely upon municipal wastewater systems or local septic systems to handle wastewater, and have access to dependable sources of power. These are not ideal times, but there are options for each of these three challenges – such as modifying menu choices, pivoting to take-out only, using disposable plates and cutlery, and securing a portable toilet (or sharing one with another business).

Restaurants that have not had water restored can apply to reopen and operate under an Emergency Operations Plan according to the NC Food Code 8-404.11. An Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) must be reviewed and approved by the Health Department. Your local and state health department can help with an EOP to meet the individual circumstances of a business.

- Because of the challenge noted above, restaurants may need to limit or simplify their menu based on the amount of water available and the procedure the restaurant is using for operating. If possible, a copy of the menu should be submitted with the EOP.
- Water must come from a safe source, such as the municipal water system, an approved and tested community well, a water supply company or bottled water. Ideally, water should have an invoice, bill of sale or similar documentation to show it is from an approved source. If you need to rely upon a water storage truck, tank and other container, make sure it's designed for potable water. If in doubt, you can seek copies of equipment spec sheets or pictures of equipment. and water containers and tanks must be filled using potable water hoses.
- Restaurants should make sure there is no cross connection or backflow into the municipal plumbing system, even if it is not operational. Connections should be fitted with approved backflow prevention devices. Restaurants must provide water with gravity flow for handwashing. A picture of a temporary handwashing setup can be seen here.



Water must be available for flushing toilets, either using “gray water” or other non-potable water without visible contamination from a bucket to flush toilets. If that is unavailable, chemical toilets, composting toilets or other portable toilets (porta potties) can be used and approved.

As a guide to estimating the amount of water needed, a restaurant should consider having enough water to do the following:

- Wash dishes in three compartment sink (36 gallons)
- Handwashing (40 gallons)
- Sanitizer buckets (5 gallons each)
- Plus any additional water needed for cooking and preparing ingredients.

We are eager to help you to reopen and resume providing safe and nutritious meals to your clientele. If you have any questions, please contact your local health department. You can also reach the NCDHHS Environmental Health Section for questions related to Hurricane Helene response between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. daily at 919-707-5999 or by emailing EHpreparednessquestions@dhhs.nc.gov.

Additional resources available:

- Emergency Operations Plan Checklist: <https://ehs.dph.ncdhhs.gov/faf/food/fd/docs/EmergencyActionPlanChecklist.pdf>
- CFP Emergency Action Plan for Retail Food Establishments: www.foodprotect.org/media/guide/Emergency_Action_Plan_for_Retail_food_Est.pdf



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