

Unpermitted Roadside Stand Briefing

Snohomish County Council Health and
Community Committee Meeting

January 27th, 2026



Snohomish County Food Safety Program

- Program has oversight over retail food operations within Snohomish County to safeguard public health and provide to consumers food that is safe, not adulterated and honestly presented.
- Food Safety Program includes
 - Routine Food Inspections
 - Complaint Investigations
 - Food Borne Illness Investigations
 - Temporary Food Establishment Permitting
 - Plan Review and Permitting of Retail Food Establishments
 - Health Education

Regulatory Authority

The authority for the Snohomish County Food Safety Program derives from the Washington State Retail Food Code (WAC 246-215).

The Snohomish County Board of Health can enact rules that are stricter than the State code – but cannot enact rules that are more lax.

Unpermitted Roadside Stands

- Since 2023 there has been a rapid proliferation of roadside stands statewide. This is an issue not only for Snohomish County but across the Western United States.
- What is the public health risk
 - Lack of sanitation – no proper handwashing facilities or employee bathroom access
 - Inadequate food storage to store food at safe temperatures
 - Lack of separate areas or equipment to handle both raw and cooked foods, increasing the risk of cross contamination.



Additional Concerns

- Waste Disposal – Several jurisdictions within Snohomish County have had issues with fat and grease waste being dumped directly down storm drains.
- Transportation – Many stands set up in the public right-of-way, impeding sidewalk usage and storing flammable materials close to the travel lanes.
- Economic Fairness- Unpermitted roadside stands take business away from properly permitted establishments – who comply not only with the Retail Food Code but other code requirements and laws pertaining to business operation.



Current Enforcement Efforts

By the numbers.....

Number of Unpermitted Roadside Stand Food Complaints per year.

2022	16
2023	36
2024	32
2025....	203

5 Food Borne Illness Complaints in 2025 associated with Unpermitted Roadside stands

40 unpermitted roadside stand closures since May 2025

62 hours of staff time dedicated to evening unpermitted roadside stand investigations between September 2025 and December 2025.



FOOD PROGRAM INVESTIGATES COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY THE PUBLIC.

When found operating, a cease and desist notice to stop retail sale of food is issued along with information on how to obtain a retail food permit – documents are in multiple languages. When possible, coordinate with local law enforcement agency to work with our inspectors during closures.



POST CLOSURES TO WEBPAGE FOR PUBLIC AWARENESS.



PROVIDING INFORMATION ON HOW TO KNOW IF AN ESTABLISHMENT IS PERMITTED AND THE HEALTH RISKS OF EATING FROM AN UNPERMITTED ESTABLISHMENT.



Unpermitted Food Stand Links

- [Unpermitted Foodservice Notifications | Snohomish County Health Department, WA](#) Snohomish County Unpermitted Closures
- <https://www.snohd.org/m/newsflash/Home/Detail/867> Be Aware of Unpermitted Food Carts, Trucks and Stands
- [Illegal food stands surge in Snohomish County | king5.com](#)
- [A gross picture is worth 1,000 words about why you shouldn't eat from unpermitted vendors. - Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department Newsletter](#) from nearby County dealing with similar unpermitted operations.

Enforcement Limitations

- Environmental Health inspectors only enforce the Washington State Retail Food Code and the Snohomish County Board of Health Code and the enforcement provision provided in those codes.
- Inspectors do not have law enforcement authority to require identification. This makes filing civil suit difficult as we cannot identify operators or owners of the unpermitted stands, as our next level enforcement is a civil action.
- Civil proceedings take time and resources.
- Lack of an actionable enforcement step after initial notice to close has encouraged the stands to continue operation. Oftentimes the stands reopen the same night they are closed but in a different location.

Enforcement Ideas

- License plate tracking
- Focused enforcement on central food preparation facilities
- Confiscating food and/or equipment
- Adding increased night and weekend enforcement once next level enforcement is identified
- Increased collaboration with law enforcement.

To be effective, it will be necessary to adopt code changes and work in partnership with other agencies.

Next steps.....

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- Starting in December, Washington Department of Health is leading a workgroup made up of local health departments from across the state, specifically to address next steps and share tactics in unpermitted roadside stand enforcement from across the state. The goal is to find a statewide solution to the issue. This workgroup is in the early stages of discussion with the State Attorney General to develop a legal path for the disposal of food served at an unpermitted establishment.
 - Snohomish County Health Department proposes convening a workgroup of local municipalities and agencies to share ideas, tactics available and enforcement solutions.
 - Work on a public information campaign on the risks of unpermitted stands and how to identify if an establishment has a permit.