

# STARTING A FOOD BUSINESS

## A HELPFUL GUIDE



To assist those who are planning to open  
a food business in Cincinnati

Developed by the Food Protection Program  
at Columbus Public Health, adapted by  
Cincinnati Health Department

*Updated September, 2020*



# HELLO!

---

Thanks for your interesting in opening a food business in the City of Cincinnati! This guide contains information that will help you navigate the Cincinnati Health Department Food Licensing process.

Though the food license is a very important part of opening your food business, there may be other departments you will need to contact. Please plan well and give yourself plenty of time to complete all the necessary steps with the pertinent departments. See the list below for departments in the city and state that *may* need to be involved in getting your business up and running.

OFFICE	SERVICE	PHONE NUMBER
Cincinnati Health Food Safety	Plan review and inspections	513-564-1751
City of Cincinnati Building Department	General Info	513-352-3271
	HVAC - Main	513-352-3961
	Plan Review - Main	513-352-3313
	Plumbing - Main	513-352-3280
Metropolitan Sewer District (MSD)	Sewer Use and Grease Trap Questions	513-557-7000
Ohio Dept of Commerce/Division of Liquor Control	Liquor License	614- 644-2360
Ohio Department of Taxation	Vendor's License - Apply Online	<a href="http://business.ohio.gov">http://business.ohio.gov</a>
	Tax ID# (EIN)	<a href="http://www.irs.com">www.irs.com</a>
Ohio Department of Agriculture	Licenses wholesale operations and home bakeries	614-728-6250 <a href="http://www.ohioagriculture.gov">www.ohioagriculture.gov</a>

## Where do I begin?

Nearly every new or significantly altered facility serving or selling food or beverages in Cincinnati must submit plans to CHD before a license can be issued. A sanitarian in our Food Safety Program will review the plans in order to ensure that the equipment, facilities and design will be suitable for the food items served or sold at the facility.

This guide will help you to determine when you need to submit plans, who you need to get in contact with, and what to expect as far as process and timeline.

# PLANNING AHEAD

---

## What is required in my facility?

There are some requirements common to all licensed food service operations and retail food establishments, but many things will depend heavily on the menu. All businesses are unique and may require a different combination of sinks, storage, refrigeration, and other equipment to support their business.

## SINKS, EQUIPMENT, FINISHES & STORAGE

---

**Hand washing sinks:** All facilities are required to have adequate employee hand washing sinks, conveniently located in each food and dishwashing area, and equipped with soap and disposable towels or hand dryers. Convenient location indicates that the sink is accessible within a certain distance and visible from any food area, including bars and ice dispensing locations such as wait stations. These sinks are required to have signs reminding employees to wash hands.

Exception: In facilities that serve only prepackaged foods, a hand sink is only required in a restroom.

**HELPFUL TIP:** Each sink described in this section can only be used for its designated purpose (hand washing, dishwashing, food prep, mop sink, dump sink).

**Commercial equipment:** All equipment used for a retail food operation must be listed as commercial and must be certified by a recognized testing agency (e.g. NSF, ETL, UL sanitation). No household equipment is permitted. Casters are required for large equipment if it is not already on legs or permanently fixed (caulked) to the floor with space for cleaning.

**HELPFUL TIP:** Check the label on the equipment or request a specification sheet from the vendor before purchasing. Request casters for larger pieces, such as coolers, to make them easier to move for cleaning.

**Dry storage space:** Enough space must be planned for storage of food, dishes, and equipment. Ensure that there are designated locations for bulk foods, cans, and other items. All food items must be stored at least 6” off the floor, both in walk-in coolers or freezers, and on storage shelving. Metal office shelving and raw wood shelves are not allowed. Look for wire racks and food grade shelving.

Equipment and single service items (e.g. ‘to go’ containers) must be protected from contamination and stored at least 6” off the floor.

**HELPFUL TIP:** Bins for bulk items (e.g. rice, flour) must be made of food grade material and marked with the type of food inside. Trash cans and non-food grade containers cannot be used for bulk food storage.

**Chemical storage:** Chemicals must be stored below and/or away from food items, equipment and utensils to prevent contamination of these items. Chemicals cannot be stored above the dishwashing sink or on the floor.

**Employee area:** There must be lockers, shelving or a designated area provided only for employee belongings. Personal belongings such as coats, purses, cigarettes, and phones cannot be kept in food areas.

**HELPFUL TIP:** The employee area is also a great location for storage of employee beverage cups or food.

**Utility sink:** Also called a mop sink or service sink, all facilities are required to have a sink designated for cleaning of mops and cleaning tools, and for disposal of mop water. The utility sink must include a faucet and drain. This sink should have hooks or other means to allow mops to air dry.

**HELPFUL TIP:** A curbed sink provides an easier means to dump mop water, and is a good storage spot for the mop bucket when not in use.

**Adequate lighting:** Lighting must be enough in food areas and other areas to allow for safe work conditions and to facilitate cleaning. A guide to general lighting intensity requirements are listed below.

- 50 foot candles: cooking areas, food prep areas, food service areas
- 20 foot candles: customer self service, inside equipment (e.g. reach in cooler), hand washing, dish-washing, utensil storage, restrooms
- 10 foot candles: walk-in coolers and freezers, dry storage, and other areas

**HELPFUL TIP:** When submitting a lighting plan for plan review, it should include (1) type of fixtures, (2) location of fixtures, and (3) whether using plastic covers, shields, or shatterproof bulbs to protect food & equipment.

**Smooth and cleanable surfaces:** All floors, walls and ceilings in food areas (service, storage, preparation, dish-washing) must be smooth, easily cleanable, and in some areas, moisture-resistant. Carpet is allowed only in areas for packaged food storage.

Approved surfaces which are commonly used...

- Floors: quarry tile, ceramic tile, sealed concrete, poured epoxy
- Walls: stainless steel, FRP, glossy painted drywall, painted concrete block
- Ceilings: vinyl coated ACT (drop ceiling), glossy painted drywall
- Base Coving: tile, rubber

**HELPFUL TIP:** Every facility must submit a finish schedule with plan review. Use the example in the Plan Review Application to help you.

**Dishwashing sinks:** A 3-compartment sink designated for dish-washing is required in any operation that sells or serves unpackaged food. The sink should have curved interior edges and at least three (3) compartments for washing, rinsing and sanitizing. The sink should also have two (2) drainboards, one for collection of dirty dishes and the other for air drying. See the example on page 13.

Dishwashers are optional, but a 3-compartment sink is required in a facility that sells or serves unpackaged food. Each compartment of the sink must be large enough to submerge the largest piece of equipment you have (i.e. a small bar sink would not be acceptable for washing large pots and pans).

**Food processing sink (vegetable sink):** The Cincinnati Health Department does not allow food processing in a hand sink or dish-washing sink. A separate sink is required for the processing of produce and other foods. Processing can include washing, soaking, thawing, and using ice baths for cooling. If a food processing sink is not available, a facility will be limited to using only pre-washed produce.

A food prep sink must have an indirect drain, specifically an air gap, to prevent backflow from a sewage system into equipment in which food is placed. The air gap should be twice the diameter of the pipe, but no less than one inch.

**HELPFUL TIP:** Installing a food sink with an integral drainboard will provide you with a food prep surface for items washed in the sink.

**Ventilation hoods:** A ventilation hood is required at a grill line, or where other cooking equipment and high temperature dish machines are located, to prevent the accumulation of grease, heat, condensation, smoke and vapors.

Installation of a ventilation hood requires a permit and inspections. Contact the Cincinnati Building Department with questions about ventilation requirements or permits for installation.

**Fire suppression system:** If a ventilation hood is required because of the use of grease producing equipment (fryers, grill, etc), a Type I Hood with fire suppression is required. The fire suppression system acts like a fire extinguisher in case of a grease or cooking fire.

If a hood is required for heat, condensation or gas only, a Type II Hood might be allowed. Verify the type of hood required through Building Services (contact information on page 2).

**Grease interceptor (grease trap):** A grease trap is a device that is attached to sinks and/or drains to collect fats, oils and grease in order to prevent accumulation in our sewer system. Grease traps are connected to dishwashing sinks, some floor drains (e.g. at wok lines) and some dishwashers.

Grease traps are not a requirement of the Cincinnati Health Department but, if installed, must be easily accessible for cleaning. Contact the Metropolitan Sewer District or your licensed plumber with questions regarding whether a grease trap is needed in your facility, size if required, and installation.

**HELPFUL TIP:** A grease trap can be a costly installation, and is generally required when a dishwashing sink is used. Make sure to research and budget for this item in your planning stages.

**HELPFUL TIP:** Grease traps must be cleaned periodically to keep them working properly. An indoor grease trap may need to be cleaned monthly/quarterly, while a larger outdoor unit may only need cleaning once or twice per year.

**Dump sink:** Bars and coffee/smoothie/ice cream shops often require a dedicated dump sink for disposing of liquid waste (leftover drinks). This liquid waste should NOT be disposed of in a hand sink, mop sink, prep sink, toilet or other plumbing fixture used for other purposes. Dump sinks should be indirectly connected empty into an approved waste receptor such as a floor drain, hub drain, or floor sink.

**HELPFUL TIP:** A 4-compartment sink is often used behind the bar as a combination dump sink and 3-compartment sink.

# RUNNING YOUR BUSINESS (WITH FOOD SAFETY IN MIND)

---

Here are some important questions about how you will safely prepare food for your business that you should start to think about. These questions may also be asked during future inspections:

## Employee Training...

- How will you train your staff about food safety?
- What food safety practices will be covered during staff orientation?
- What is your employee health policy? What do you do about a sick worker? How will you share this policy with employees?

## Services...

- Who will provide your waste pickup?
- How will you handle grease waste and cleaning your grease interceptor?
- Do you have a certified pest control operator?
- Who will clean your hood system and/or fire suppression system?
- Who will provide support and maintenance for your dishwasher?
- Is your facility secure, and is your food supply safe? Do you make sure to use approved suppliers? Does your food come from approved sources?

## Facilities...

- Do you have enough hot water capacity for the busiest time of day?
- Do you have the storage space needed for dry goods?
- Do you plan to expand the operation, and will you have the space?
- Are floors, walls and ceilings constructed with cleanable materials?

## Equipment...

- Do you have enough space in your coolers and freezers? Can you prevent overstocking and make certain to allow for air circulation?
- How will you keep hot foods hot?
- How will you keep cold foods cold?
- Have you purchased thermometers for all coolers? Do you have thermometers for taking food temperatures?

## Plan for Easy Cleaning...

There are several things you can do to prevent the amount of future maintenance necessary for your facility and provide ease of cleaning.

- Have you considered stainless steel on walls at the grill line, and behind and around grease producing equipment?

- Have you placed heavy equipment on casters, so that it can be moved easily? Every other piece of equipment, especially at the grill line, should be on casters. This makes it easier to clean behind and between equipment.
- Can you avoid sealing equipment and sinks to walls, and instead brace and set equipment away from walls and other equipment? This makes it easier to clean behind 3 compartment sinks, dishwashers, etc. Set equipment at least 4 inches from the wall.

## Fixed Equipment...

- Is all equipment that is fixed (because it is not easily movable) installed to allow for easy cleaning? This means that it must be spaced from nearby equipment or sealed to walls or equipment .
- Is table mounted equipment that is not easily moveable on legs or sealed to a table?
- Is all floor mounted equipment (in kitchen areas) that is not easily movable sealed to the floor or elevated on 6 inch legs?

## Processes...

- What will be your process for date marking ready-to-eat food products?
- How will you ensure that a 'first in, first out' system is used for foods?
- How will foods be properly thawed? Do you have enough cooler space to allow for overnight thawing?
- Can large amounts of leftover food be properly cooled? Do you have shallow pans, ice wands, or other necessary tools?
- Will you keep temperature logs? Who will be responsible? When will you take temperatures?
- How will you avoid bare hand contact with ready to eat foods? Will you use gloves, tongs, utensils, deli paper, or other tools?

All new food businesses (and many undergoing remodeling) must complete the plan review process. Here we will walk you through all of the correct steps to obtain a food service license from the City of Cincinnati.

# FOOD SAFETY EDUCATION

---

Educating your employees is an important part of planning for a successful food business. The Ohio Uniform Food Code requires that a Person-in-Charge (PIC) be present during all hours of operation of a food business.

The PIC must understand basic food safety concepts, and will need to demonstrate knowledge by compliance with the food code. This person must make sure that safe food handling practices are followed to lower the risk of foodborne illness.

The Cincinnati Health Department provides food safety classes that will assist in educating your employees and it is . We provide a **Level 1 food safety class** (4 hours) which reviews the basics of food safety and requirements of the Ohio Uniform Food Code. We also provide the nationally recognized **ServSafe® course** (16 hours), recommended for all managers.

The current schedule and registration form is at [www.publichealth.columbus.gov](http://www.publichealth.columbus.gov).

# STEPS TO OPENING YOUR BUSINESS

---

The Cincinnati Health Department reviews facility plans to make sure that the design and equipment in a facility are proper for the storage, preparation and service of the foods on the proposed menu or food list.

## Step 1: FOOD FACILITY REVIEW (FFR)

### Who must an FFR application?

- New facilities: New construction and facilities that have never been licensed as a food operation in the past.
- Remodeled or altered facilities: Major changes or alterations such as installation of a walk in cooler or ventilation hood, or expanding a kitchen.
- Change of business: Changes in layout or equipment (example: a new owner converts a bakery into a full service restaurant, and grills and ovens have been added to the kitchen).

\*If you are not sure whether a food facility review is required, please contact CHD.

### What is the fee?

See page 13 for an updated fee schedule for plan review.

### What is the process?

After we have received your set of plans, complete application and payment for plan review (submitted to the Permit Center at 805 Central Ave, Cincinnati, OH, 45202) CHD will begin reviewing the FFR. CHD has up to 30 days to begin the review, so please plan accordingly.

If there are any questions about the plans, or changes that need to be discussed, we will contact you (generally by phone or e-mail).

When plans are approved, we will notify you (generally by phone or e-mail). A formal approval letter will follow, and will be mailed to the contact noted on the FFR application. **A note on when to submit the application:** This FFR application should be submitted as soon as you have a planned layout and equipment, but before work begins. This application can be processed at the same time as other building permit applications. Plumbing permits for a given project will generally not be issued until this food facility review has been submitted and approved.

## Step 2: LICENSING

**Licensing Inspection:** After the FFR application has been approved and all work is complete, you will need to contact CHD for a licensing inspection. The licensing inspection can be conducted once you have all required 'sign-offs' from the appropriate city departments. (Newly constructed facilities will need to have final approval from the Building Department before a license can be issued.)

During the license inspection, the sanitarian will ask for some information about the license holder (owner) and facility. It is helpful to have business information available, including federal tax ID and owner contact information.

**Licensing:** If there are no outstanding issues, payment will be collected for the license, and a signed license application will be given indicating permission to operate. At this point the operation is licensed and approved to operate. The printed license will be sent to you in the mail.

License renewal is once a year, and payment for licenses must be received by March 1 every year. Late fees are added after March 1.



## HOW DO I KNOW WHEN I'M READY FOR MY FINAL INSPECTION?

---

**Have you completed all items on this checklist? If YES, you are ready!**

- I have read the 'Starting a Food Business' guide to help design my facility based on menu items and processes.
- I submitted plans to the Cincinnati Health Department.
- I submitted plans, food facility review application and plan fee to the Cincinnati Health Department.
- I received plan approval from Cincinnati Health Department and the Building Department.
- Work was performed by licensed contractors and permits were obtained when necessary.
- All construction or remodel work is complete.
- FOR A NEW FACILITY: I have a certificate of occupancy (CO) or temporary CO from the Building Department

OR

FOR A REMODEL: I have final approval for any work performed, including inspections and sign offs on permits.

- I have contacted the Cincinnati Health Department for an opening inspection.
- Before the scheduled opening inspection (not all inclusive list):
  - Construction is complete
  - Kitchen/food areas are clean, everything is installed/working and ready to use.
  - Space is customer ready, but with no food onsite yet.
  - Required supplies, such as sanitizer, sanitizer test kit, thermometers, gloves are onsite.
  - Hot water is available at all sinks.
  - Refrigerated equipment is running at 41°F or below.
  - The dish machine (if applicable) is in operation.
  - The CO or TCO paperwork (from Building Dept) is onsite.
  - A check or money order is available for the license fee.

# EQUIPMENT EXAMPLES

---

## HANDWASHING SINK

---



## REACH-IN REFRIGERATOR

---

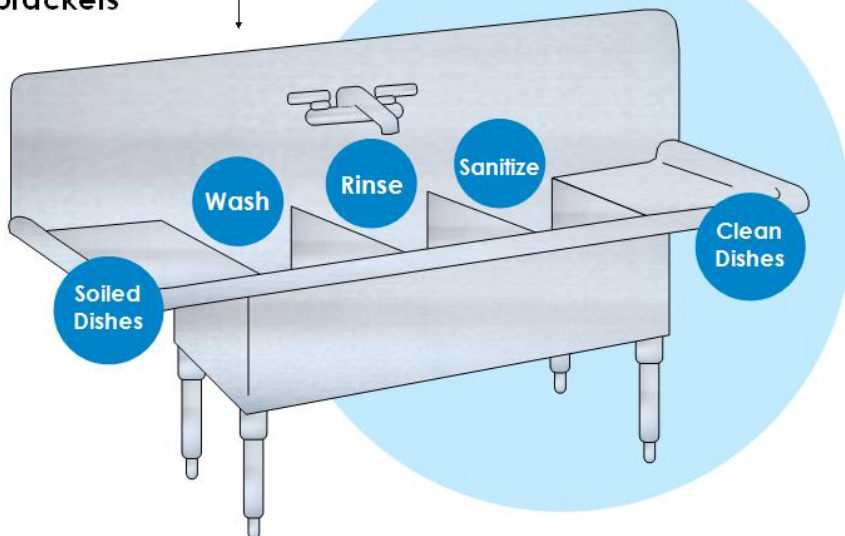
On casters so it's easy to move and clean around



## 3 COMPARTMENT SINK

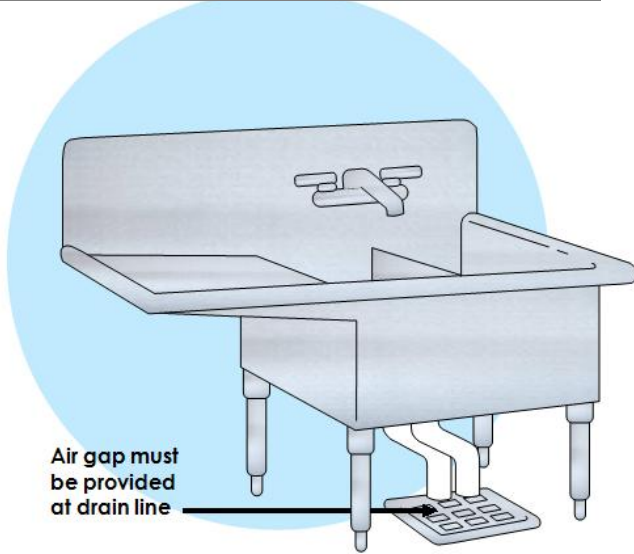
---

Installed 4" off the wall with brackets

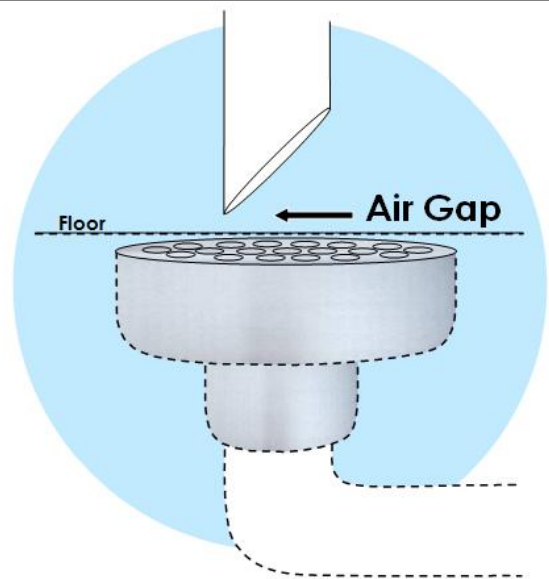


# EQUIPMENT EXAMPLES, CONTINUED

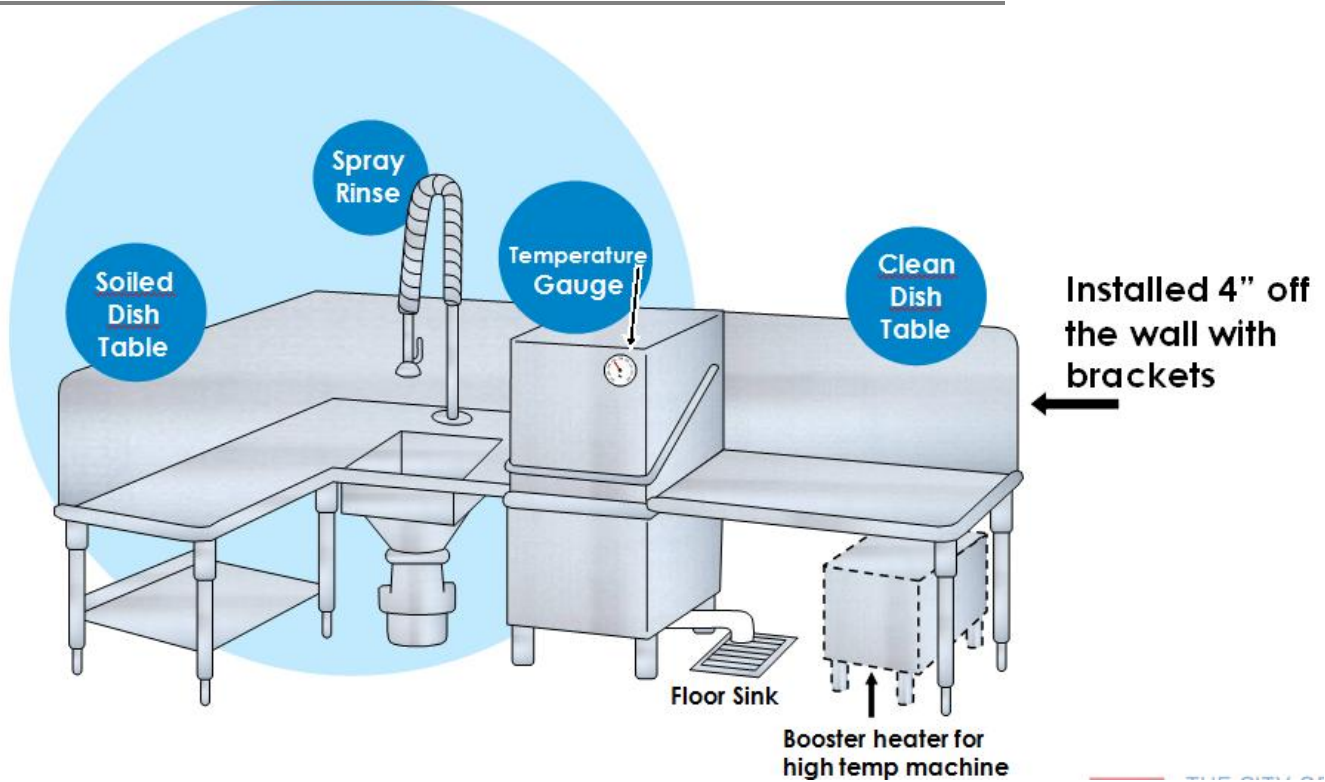
## FOOD PREPARATION SINK



## INDIRECT CONNECTION



## COMMERCIAL DISHWASHER



# FEE SCHEDULE (AS OF 9/1/2020)

---

Please make checks payable to the Columbus City Treasurer.

<b>PLAN REVIEW FEES</b>	<b>&lt;25,000 square feet</b>	<b>&gt;25,000 square feet</b>
Commercial	\$400.00	\$800.00
Non-Commercial	\$200.00	\$400.00
Commercial Risk Level 1	\$200.00	\$400.00
Non-Commercial Risk Level 1	\$100.00	\$200.00
Remodel/Alteration	\$200.00	\$400.00
Risk Level 1 Remodel	\$100.00	\$200.00

*The plan review fee must be submitted with application.*

<b>FSO &amp; RFE LICENSE FEES</b>	<b>Commercial</b>		<b>Non-Commercial</b>	
	<b>&lt;25,000 ft<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>&gt;25,000 ft<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>&lt;25,000 ft<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>&gt;25,000 ft<sup>2</sup></b>
Risk Class 1	\$304.00	\$412.00	\$152.00	\$206.00
Risk Class 2	\$334.00	\$426.00	\$167.00	\$213.00
Risk Class 3	\$584.00	\$1348.00	\$292.00	\$674.00
Risk Class 4	\$714.00	\$1420.00	\$357.00	\$710.00

*The license fee will be collected at the final inspection. Please do not send it to our office.*