

Rules and Regulations for Restaurants and Bars

By Rieva Lesonsky



Owning a restaurant or bar comes with so many regulations attached, it's easy to want to throw in the towel. All businesses have to obtain certain state and federal permits and licenses, but when you're serving food and drink, the stakes are higher because consumer health is involved. Food and beverage businesses must comply with a myriad of industry specific regulations, and running afoul of any one of them could lead to bad publicity and permanently turn customers off.

To know what's required of you, start by visiting the federal and state agencies' websites. The Small Business Administration (SBA) website contains a [Food and Beverage guide](#) with many helpful links to articles and resources.

Next, track down your industry association, which may operate on a national or state level. For example, the [California Restaurant Association](#) has specific information for issues related to California restaurants and bars. The National Restaurant Association has a list of [state restaurant associations](#). Make an appointment to meet with a representative if you can. The association should be up on all the latest regulations.

You can also make an appointment with your local [SCORE office](#) and get one-on-one advice from former restaurant entrepreneurs.

Here are some of the rules and regulations you'll need to adhere to:

Food storage: Food must be stored separately and labeled by date received. The first items received must be the first items used. The facility must also have a working thermometer, and refrigeration must be below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Anything above 40 degrees allows bacteria to grow.

Employee cleanliness: Employees are expected to be clean, wash their hands regularly, and keep hair pulled back so it doesn't get into food or drinks.

Employee safety: All employers are subject to federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations. OSHA sets and enforces safety standards to ensure safe and healthful working conditions. OSHA will inspect your location and help you meet their standards.

Restaurant inspections: Each state has its own restaurant inspection process, but usually the inspection is done by the County's Health Department. Restaurant permits can be suspended for any number of violations including rodent infestation, lack of hot water, faulty plumbing and more.

Selling alcohol: Contact your local city office to apply for a license to sell alcohol. There are different classes of licenses depending on what kind of alcohol you're serving and where the drinks are served. If you're opening a brewery or winery and producing your own alcohol, you'll need to contact the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau for approval.

Your SCORE mentor can help you get up to speed on the bar or restaurant regulations in your area.

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