



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Agriculture
Bureau of Food Safety and Laboratory Services
Division of Food Safety

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Common Questions and Answers

Q: In regard to a local health municipality, how is it determined when local health is to enforce the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Food Employee Certification Act?

A: The statute, 3 Pa.C.S.A, § 6503 (d), specifies that certain food establishments regulated by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture or local health organizations are to adopt food safety protection and training standards. The only local health municipalities not affected by the Act are those that had a food employee certification program in place prior to September 01, 1994. Municipalities that had programs in place prior to 9/01/94 include Chester, Philadelphia, Montgomery, Allegheny and Bucks.

Q: How many people from an establishment are required to become certified?

A: The statute requires one per establishment, not one per shift. The certified supervisory employee does not have to be on premises during all hours of operation. Some of the larger operations may want to consider more than one certified employee. A supermarket that has a meat department, seafood department, deli department, salad bar and hot foods is an example of an establishment that may want to consider having more than one certified individual.

Q: What type of food establishments will have to comply with food employee certification?

A: Food establishments that are under the jurisdiction of local health or the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and are processing or handling potentially hazardous foods. These establishments may include retail food stores, restaurants, mobile units, bars/clubs, delis, food vendors, hand-dipped ice cream, bakeries, sushi operations, smoked fish operations, seafood processor, ice manufacturers, salad manufacturers, unpasteurized cider operation and other types of food establishments that do not fall under an exemption category.

Q: I was certified in Montgomery County, but now I am employed in Delaware County. Is my Montgomery County certification valid in Delaware County?

A: The local health departments (Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Allegheny, Montgomery, Lansdale and State College) that had a certification program in place prior to September 01, 1994, have the option to apply to the Department to become an approved training program. The program would have to meet the requirements set forth in the Food Employee Certification Statute and Regulations. The program would be reviewed and recommended to the Department by the Advisory Board and the Department would grant final approval. If the program has not been submitted and approved, it would not be valid certification in Delaware County.

Q: I was certified by the state of Illinois, but now I reside and work in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania. Is my Illinois certification acceptable?

A: The statute allows for reciprocity between states. The Department will accept certification from other states if the other state requirements are comparable and there has been a reciprocal agreement established between the Department and the other state. Currently, however, there are no reciprocal agreements between the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and any other states.

Q: What is the mandatory compliance date?

A: The mandatory compliance date is July 01, 2004 for all food establishments that must comply with the statute.

Q: How long is the initial certification valid?

A: The initial certification is valid five years from the date the certificate is issued and then re-certification is required.

Q: Does it matter what type of food safety training that I take to qualify for the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's certification program?

A: All training programs have to have prior Department approval before qualifying for the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture re-certification program. The designated supervisory employee must take a training program that has been approved by the Department.

Q: What programs have been approved at this time? Where do I find information regarding an approved food employee certification training program?

A: Training program site information can be received from the Department by calling (717) 772-8354 or by writing to the following address:

Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
Bureau of Food Safety & Laboratory Services
2301 North Cameron Street
Harrisburg, PA 17110-9408

Approved programs and contact information can also be accessed through this website at **[Food Employee Certification Approved Training Program](#)** .

Q: What type of training is required for certification?

A: The supervisory employee or an individual designated by the establishment owner to fulfill the Act requirements will be trained in food safety and sanitation. The training program for the initial certification is to be a minimum of 15 hours and an examination is given upon completion of the training program.

Q: Can I substitute my education and/or industry experience for the training and just take the examination?

A: A certificate cannot be issued until an applicant successfully completes an approved Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture training program (minimum 15 hours) and examination.

Q: I enrolled in an approved program that was to be given over a four-day period. I attended class on the first day, but I did not attend any of the other classes. I decided to take the examination anyway, and I received a score of 90%. Can I apply for certification from the Department?

A: The minimum course requirements of 15 hours have not been met. An examination cannot be taken based on experience or education. As per the statute, the supervisory employee shall be certified upon the completion of an approved training program and successfully passing a test.

Q: I have a Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture licensed mobile unit and I sell gyros and fresh-squeezed lemonade. I operate in Pennsylvania, but I live in Florida, do I have to comply with Pennsylvania's Food Employee Certification Act?

A: Yes. You are operating in Pennsylvania and are licensed by the Department. Your operation involves the processing of potentially hazardous foods, which requires compliance with the Act.

Q: I am registered with the Department, because I manufacture fudge and funnel cakes at my concession stand, do I have to comply with the Food Employee Certification Act?

A: Neither products produced are a potentially hazardous food. As per the statute, food establishments that handle only non-potentially hazardous food are exempt.

Q: I work in a licensed dietary kitchen from September 1 to June 15 of each year. I am the designated certified supervisory employee. A licensed camp employs me from June 20 to August 31. Do I qualify to become the certified supervisory employee in the camp?

A: Yes. The dates do not overlap and the school does not employ you during the camp months, so you could become the certified supervisory person for both positions.

Q: What format of training programs is available? Is there a home study program? Is a computer-generated program available? Can the training program be a combination of formats?

A: All formats of study are acceptable for the certification training program. The developer of a training program can use one or more formats as long as the program meets the requirements of the Act and the regulations. Please check with the Department or the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's website for current training programs.

Q: Can anyone seek certification under the law, even if they are exempt?

A: Anyone who wants to become certified may do so by complying with the requirements of the statute and regulations. This also applies to establishments, which are not under the jurisdiction of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture or a local health jurisdiction. This may apply to a nursing home kitchen, hospital cafeteria, day care center or senior citizens center.

Q: Is it mandatory for public schools to comply with the Food Employee Certification Act?

A: Schools that are licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture or by a local health jurisdiction are required to comply with the Act. Unlicensed schools may voluntarily comply with the Act, but it is not mandatory.

Q: How long do I have to meet the requirements for re-certification?

A: You will have from the date the certificate is issued until before the expiration date on the certificate - five years.

Q: How do I become re-certified? How many hours of training are involved? Do I have to take an examination?

A: Re-certification is accomplished by completing a pre-approved training program. The minimum hours requirement is 7.5 hours. The hours can be cumulative and there is no examination required for re-certification. Re-certification is completed every five years after the initial certification.

Q: What if I don't complete my requirements for re-certification before the expiration date on my initial certificate? Can I complete the requirements after the expiration date on my certificate and still become re-certified?

A: If the expiration date on the initial certificate expires before you meet the requirements for re-certification, the applicant must take an approved training program and pass the required exam before a certificate can be issued.

Q: I have completed my initial certification that expires on June 30, 2001. I have been re-certified for the next five years and the certificate expires on June 30, 2006. What if I do not complete my re-certification requirements before the expiration date of June 30, 2006?

A: The applicant must successfully complete an approved training program and pass the required examination before a certificate can be issued.

Q: English is not my first language, are there training programs available in other languages?

A: The National Restaurant Association (NRA) has developed training programs in a number of languages. NRA has the ServSafe examinations available in English, Cantonese, Chinese, French Canadian, Greek, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Mandarin Chinese and Spanish. NRA currently has text material available in Spanish and is working on other languages. Please call the Department for an updated list and availability of training programs in other languages.

Q: What about an applicant with special needs such as hearing or sight disabilities?

A: Special arrangements can be made through the sponsor of the training program for anyone with special needs.

Q: What format of questions is used on the examination, and how many questions are included on the exam?

A: The test questions can be of any format as long as they adequately test food safety knowledge. There must be a minimum of 80 examination questions.

Q: What is considered a passing grade to meet the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's certification requirements?

A: To qualify for the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's certification, an applicant must score 70% or higher on the examination.

Q: I took a ServSafe training program last year, it was the 15 hours program, but I received a 73% on the examination. I did not earn a ServSafe certificate, because I received a score of less than 75%. Can I apply to the Department for certification?

A: Yes, the minimum score requirement for the PDA Food Employee Certification Program is 70%. Valid documentation must be submitted along with application AFSL-279, Request For Food Employee Certification.

Q: I took a ServSafe course three years ago, can I apply to the Department for certification?

A: Yes, as long as the program that you took meets the 15 hour requirement and regulations set forth by the Food Employee Certification Act. You can apply to the Department by submitting a Request For Food Employee Certification along with proper documentation. Approved courses, meeting the requirements for 15 hours training completed within five years of the application date, can be submitted to the Department.

Q: If I took a ServSafe training program two years ago and I apply for the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's certification in December 2001, when will my five-year period certification begin and end?

A: The certification period will begin when the Department issues the certificate. A certificate issued by the Department in December 2001 would expire December 2006.

Q: What are valid forms of documentation?

A: Course-completion documents issued by sponsors, college course transcripts, letters from the course instructors and other similar documentation (to evidence course attendance and successful completion) are valid forms of documentation.

Q: If I receive less than 70% on my examination, can I take a re-test or will I have to repeat the training program before taking another examination?

A: A person receiving less than the 70% minimum exam score can be retested without repeating the training program.

Q: Are any food establishments exempt from the food employee certification?

A: The exemption categories are : (1) A food establishment that does not handle any potentially hazardous foods; (2) A food establishment that handles only commercially prepackaged foods and (3) A food manufacturer of non-potentially hazardous food. (4) An organization classified as tax-exempt under Section 501 (c)(3) of the IRS Code of 1986. (5) Food establishments managed on a not-for-profit basis by a volunteer fire company, ambulance, religious, charitable, fraternal, veterans, civic, agricultural fair, agricultural association or auxiliaries of such. (6) Food establishments managed on a not-for-profit basis by organizations supporting extra-curricular recreational activities for youth of all public, private, and parochial school systems.

Q: Who within a food establishment will have to become certified?

A: The law requires one supervisory employee or one designated by the business owner to fulfill the requirements of the statute.

Q: If I am teaching ServSafe or any of the other approved training programs, what procedures should I follow, so that my students will meet the requirements for PDA Certification?

A: Anyone teaching an approved training program should: (1) Notify the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. (2) Submit a course syllabus to show training hours and course content. It is recommended that the instructor review the Food Employee Certification Regulations, especially 76.7. Certification Training Programs: Food Safety Protection and Training Standards, prior to the submission of the syllabus. (3) Receive, after a review of the syllabus by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, a Food Employee Certification information packet. The packet will include the following: relevant PA food laws, codes, regulations, plan review packet, student applications, Form AFSL-282A & B, Food Employee Certification Test Score Report. (4) Provide the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture with a list of instructors. (5) Update the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture regarding scheduled classes and locations. store that sells milk, bread and canned goods; candy store; a store that sells prepackaged meat, canned goods, paper goods and milk; store that purchases sandwiches from a commissary and sells them from