

Repairs & Maintenance

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A Tale of Two Restaurants

Exploring how different code jurisdictions can affect your restaurants

Let's say Jeff is a restaurant owner who wants to expand his one location and open two more locations nearby. His second location is a 75-seat restaurant in a trendy area, and his third is a spin-off with 18 seats, but he wants to add four more seats.

How many toilets does each restaurant need?

It depends. When it comes to restaurant plumbing, one of the challenges is knowing which codes and regulations apply to each location—and they may not be the same.

“The locations of your restaurants and the different code jurisdictions they are in can cause deviations from international plumbing and building codes,” explains Ken King, Founder of Foodservice Consulting & Design LLC in Colorado. “These standards are not produced from a single government entity but may involve several, often contradicting, agencies and can seem arbitrary.” Jeff will need to deal with both county building and health departments, and both the local community and environmental factors can affect those regulations and create challenges.

Staying Compliant

Here are some tips on how to handle different code jurisdictions:

Never make assumptions. Contact your local authority to find out which code is adopted. In Jeff's case, his smaller restaurant is only 2 miles away from the 75-seat restaurant, but that puts it in a different code jurisdiction. Different rules apply, so contact your local government offices to get the correct information before you make your plans.

Know your equipment, or contact the manufacturer for specifications. You need to know exactly what you have or what you need to buy, and don't need to buy, in order to meet the code's standards.

If you have leverage, negotiate with the landlord on repairs for any existing plumbing. If your restaurant is opening in a preexisting space that was previously used as a restaurant, have a qualified plumber check everything and list any repairs that need to be done. The previous lessee may not have been as careful as you would hope, which could leave you with extensive issues that need to be addressed. Any repairs you make will benefit the landlord, and their future tenants, so use that pull to create a win-win deal.

When choosing new technology, such as tankless water heaters, be prepared to educate the code inspectors on how it can perform to code while saving you money. Inspectors may not

be up to date with the latest equipment and refuse your permits, or require additions, simply because they don't understand how the new systems work. A little education can go a long way to maximizing your budget. Ask the manufacturers for their marketing brochure to share with your inspector.

Don't scrimp when it comes to your commercial kitchen appliances, particularly if it will extend the life of the equipment. Your budget, and your accountant, might not allow you to install that water softener system, but for only \$1,000, you will prolong the life of your equipment. A smart investment can mean the difference between replacing a calcified dishwasher and other machines in just two to three years, versus 10 to 20 years. Be prepared to make a solid case for additions when you know it will save you and your business money in the long term. Your accountant will thank you.

Work only with plumbers and maintenance companies who know the local codes to avoid costly mistakes. Before engaging with a local contractor, make sure they understand the local codes. If possible, have close relationships with the code department and inspectors to help smooth the way when it comes to obtaining your permits. Ask questions to see how knowledgeable they are to advise on your particular needs, situation and location.

After installation of plumbing and equipment, make sure your staff are trained and adhere to the rules to extend the life of your equipment and reduce repair calls. Misuse and abuse of commercial kitchen equipment can significantly reduce the lifespan of the quality equipment you've purchased.

For the most up-to-date information on your local plumbing codes, visit your county or state building and health department websites or search for your city at <https://library.municode.com>.

So how many toilets did Jeff need? For the 75- and 18-seat restaurants, one toilet is just fine. However, if Jeff added four more seats for a total of 22, he would have to add another toilet. So, it goes to show, where you are located and the codes that apply can make a real difference to your plans and budget.

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