

# Shared Commercial Kitchens

## Owner's Guidance Document

January 2025



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## Introduction

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**This guide provides a framework, clarity and best practices to help owners and operators of shared commercial kitchens manage these risks effectively.**

Shared Commercial Kitchens can present distinct challenges because they accommodate multiple food businesses, each with unique ingredients, food processes and associated risks.

The guide contains sections on **administrative** responsibilities and **operational** responsibilities. Although the operator is required to provide a well-constructed, designed, equipped and maintained facility, not all elements of this guidance document are regulatory in nature. This guide focuses more on helping owners understand and manage the risks associated with having different users ‘under one roof’. These risks include, but are not limited to, cross-contamination, allergen management and facility usage that can affect the safety of the kitchen for all renters.

Owners of shared commercial kitchens are encouraged to review and fully understand requirements laid out in the [Ontario Food Premises Regulation](#) and other applicable legislation. In addition, [Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health’s ‘Smart Start’ Package](#) provides essential guidance for food premise operators, including details on meeting regulatory obligations, maintaining food safety, and ensuring the proper infrastructure for safe food handling.

### What is a Shared Commercial Kitchen

A shared commercial kitchen is a food premise that multiple food businesses or individuals can rent or share to prepare and produce food products. Shared commercial kitchens provide opportunities for entrepreneurship and are a community hub for mentorship and networking. Shared kitchens are often used by market vendors, food truck operators, caterers and bakers.

## Types of Shared Kitchens

### Shared Commercial Kitchen

- A kitchen that is inspected by Public Health and used by two or more separate food businesses to prepare food for sale to the public. Shared commercial kitchens are often open for extended periods of time and provide community engagement opportunities (i.e. cooking classes).

### Ghost Kitchen

- A kitchen that is inspected by Public Health and has multiple operators (separate food businesses) which only prepare meals to fulfill delivery and takeout orders. Ghost kitchens do not have a dine-in option. Ghost kitchens are often the type of business found on mobile food delivery apps.

### Examples of Shared commercial kitchens

- **Community Center Kitchens** (i.e., legions, town halls,)
- **Community Shared Spaces** (i.e., 10C Nourish Kitchen, Guelph)
- **Commissary Kitchens** (i.e., food truck kitchens)
- **Religious Facility Kitchens** (i.e., churches)

## Responsibilities of Shared Commercial Kitchen Owners

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### Administrative Responsibilities

The following topics provide a brief overview of the administrative responsibilities of a shared commercial kitchen in relation to the [Food Premises Regulation](#) and best practices for safe food handling. It is strongly recommended that policies and procedures are created for each of the topic areas to prevent an adverse food safety event.

### Public Health Notification (Owner & Renter)

If you are opening a shared commercial kitchen with the intention for renters to prepare food or serve the public, a [Notice of Intent to Operate a Food Premise](#) is required.

Why? Section 16(2) of the Ontario Health Protection and Promotion Act requires that every person who intends to operate a food premise shall give notice to the medical officer of health of the health unit in which the food premise will be located.

Renters of a shared commercial kitchen using the space to prepare food or serve the public must also notify Public Health through a [Notice of Intent to Operate a Food Premise](#).

Owners of commercial rental kitchens should notify users of this requirement and facilitate the process. In addition, users of commercial rental kitchens should be required to provide proof that they have notified Public Health before being permitted to use the space.

For questions regarding the Notice of Intent to Operate form or food safety please contact Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) Public Health at:

- Phone: 1-800-265-7293 x 4753
- Email: [PHI.Intake@wdgpublichealth.ca](mailto:PHI.Intake@wdgpublichealth.ca)

### **Public Health Inspection**

Prior to opening a commercial rental kitchen, a Public Health inspection is required. Once a notice of intent form is completed, a Public Health Inspector will contact you to discuss your plans for a shared commercial kitchen operation. This will include, but is not limited to:

- A review of your floor plan
- Operational plans/objectives of the shared commercial kitchen
- Policies and procedures
- Application processes for renters
- Pre-opening inspection

**Important:** Depending on the type of food business a Public Health inspection may be required for each renter using the shared kitchen. This requirement is at the discretion of the Public Health Inspector. Just because the kitchen is Public Health inspected does not mean everyone renting the kitchen is public health approved.

## Renter Agreements and Application Process

Renter agreements outline specific terms and conditions under which the renter may use the commercial kitchen facilities. These agreements ensure the renter is aware of specific location requirements, including Public Health and food safety requirements. Owners of shared commercial kitchens should have an agreement fully executed with each renter prior to any kitchen operations beginning.

The following items can be included in the agreement (this is not a complete list):

- The renter agrees to comply with all applicable laws and regulations.
- The renter acknowledges they have formally notified Public Health of their intent to operate and have been in direct contact with a Public Health Inspector.
- The renter shall use the premises solely for the preparation and production of food for sale to the public.
- The renter shall not use the premises for any unlawful purpose or in any manner that could damage the premises or interfere with other renters
- The renter shall only access the shared space during the allotted scheduled time. The renter must maintain high standards of cleanliness and hygiene at all times.
- The renter must ensure that all food handlers are certified in food safety as required by Ontario Food Premises regulations.
- The renter must immediately report any health or safety hazards to the owner.
- The renter is responsible for the proper use and care of all equipment.
- The renter must carry liability insurance with coverage that meets the facility's requirements
- Termination clauses

## Risk Assessment

Introducing a new renter to the kitchen will create new risks to the facility and to other renters--especially when there are multiple levels of food processing. For example, a new renter that produces a product containing peanuts would introduce a new hazard if another renter claims their product is peanut-free (note, renters of shared commercial kitchens should not make allergen-free claims and indicate on the label that the product is not made in a peanut free facility).

For this reason, it is recommended a risk assessment is completed before accepting the renter. The risk assessment will identify new hazards and assist with putting in place procedures to control those hazards.

[Using HACCP principles](#) the owner can assess what biological, physical and chemical hazards are introduced with each renter's ingredients, finished product and production flow.

Any existing facility procedures that control the hazards should be noted and any new controls that need to be implemented should be documented as well.

### **Access and Implement Plans for the Following Risks:**

#### **Allergen Cross-Contamination**

- Consider storage practices, such as keeping peanut products away from other foods.
- Implement clear handwashing and scheduling protocols to prevent allergen transfer.
- Decide if the kitchen will be peanut-free or make no gluten-free claims to avoid cross-contamination risks.

#### **Infestation of Pests**

- Store grain products in a way that prevents pantry pests (e.g., in sealed containers).
- Source ingredients from reputable suppliers to reduce the risk of infestation.
- Consider where ingredients are stored, such as avoiding storage in basements.

#### **Physical Risks**

- If using breakable packaging, such as glass jars, have a glass breakage policy to manage potential hazards.
- Implement procedures for handling and disposing of broken glass safely to protect both staff and products.

#### **Chemical Risks**

- Have specific storage and labeling for chemicals used in processing, cleaning or preserving (e.g., lubricants, peroxide sprays).
- Keep chemicals in a locked area and checked on a schedule to minimize accidental misuse or contamination.

## Microbiological Risks

- Consider facility layout and designate specific areas if new processes introduce different microorganisms (e.g., a meat processor in a bakery).
- Implement plans for production, storage, and cleaning to prevent cross-contamination.

The Risk Assessment can be documented in a table format like the one below. Some examples are pre-populated for reference.

<b>New User Risk Assessment Tool</b>			
	What is the Hazard to other Renters (i.e., What can go wrong?)	What existing procedures would control or reduce this hazard?	What new controls would need to be implemented?
Ingredients	Peanuts used may contaminate other food.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Policy prohibiting any peanut-free claims to be made.</li> <li>2. Scheduling (this User will be scheduled at end-of-day)</li> <li>3. Sanitation Program</li> <li>4. Labelling of all ingredient containers</li> </ol>	Peanuts only to be brought in one day and NOT stored in the facility.
Packaging Materials	Glass jars may break and contaminate other food.	none	Will implement a glass clean up procedure.
Receiving/Storage	Raw poultry used as ingredient may cross contaminate other renters' ready-to-eat product in storage.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Storage Program</li> <li>2. Shelf Labelling Program</li> <li>3. Daily Inspections</li> </ol>	



Ware washing	Cross contamination with dishwashing water	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sanitation Program</li> <li>2. Scheduling</li> </ol>	
Employee movement	Employee aprons contaminated with raw poultry and employee walks over to cooler or other shared areas.	The existing procedure is that contaminated aprons are removed before an employee leaves the kitchen.	N/A

### Orientation

Once the application process and risk assessment is complete, renters should be provided with an orientation. The orientation should include a tour of the facility and kitchen; education regarding the use of equipment and cleaning procedures; review of dedicated storage areas for each specific user; the opportunity to ask questions.

### Scheduling

Account for the facility’s capacity and equipment usage, as well as the types of food products being prepared each day. Specifically, ensure allergen control measures are in place, such as producing gluten-free (GF) products either at the beginning or end of the day to prevent cross-contamination.

### Facility Oversight

As the owner of a shared commercial kitchen, it is your responsibility to ensure the facility is properly maintained. This includes ensuring that kitchen equipment is operational and that both the kitchen and sanitation facilities are kept clean and sanitary. The division of responsibilities between the owner and the renters should be clearly defined in a user agreement.

To ensure that the owner’s responsibilities are fulfilled, it is recommended to conduct Daily Pre-Operational Checks. These checks should include checking the condition of the facility (floors, lighting, ceiling, ventilation, leaks), verifying that the dishwasher, refrigerator, freezer, surface sanitizer, garbage disposal, and hand sink are in good working condition and properly equipped. It is advisable to document these checks using a log / checklist.

## Documentation

Various types of documentation are essential for maintaining standards, compliance and operations of a shared commercial kitchen. It is recommended the following is in place

- **Renter Agreements**
  - Contracts with renters and service providers (i.e. dishwasher company)
- **Operational Logs**
  - Daily Pre-Operational Checks & Maintenance Logs
- **Cleaning Schedules**
  - Daily and Deep Cleaning
- **Food Safety Records**
  - Temperature Logs (cold storage, dishwasher)
- **Inspection Reports**
  - Public Health Inspections, Internal Inspections, and any Municipal Inspection Reports
- **Incident Reports**
  - Reports of foodborne illness and/or complaints
  - Facility Incidents (water, power, fire, sewage)

## Emergency Protocols

Emergency procedures should be in place to address situations that could impact food safety, including:

- power outages
- water supply issues
- fire
- recalls
- foodborne illness outbreaks
- sewage

In emergency situations always contact your Public Health inspector for guidance or visit WDG Public Health's website for information.

## Operational Responsibilities

The following sections outline controls that the owner puts in place to set up the renters for food safety success. Most controls below should be written as policies and procedures and should be checked regularly for compliance.

### Housekeeping

The kitchen is required to be maintained in a clean and sanitary manner. As a shared commercial kitchen owner, it is important to consider how this will be maintained and what the responsibilities are for the owner and for the renter. Depending on the scale of the facility, it may be beneficial to have a designated housekeeper who is responsible for end of day general cleaning (floor cleaning, supply stocking, deep cleaning etc.). It is important to note that general housekeeping and cleaning is everyone's responsibility.

### Pest Control

It is recommended to implement an integrated pest management system to prevent the entry of pests into the facility. Hiring a certified pest control company is strongly encouraged but not required by Public Health unless a pest issue arises.

### Waste Disposal

The kitchen is required to be equipped with appropriately sized garbage containers made of durable and waterproof material. A dedicated location and approved removal plan for final garbage disposal must be provided. It is important to consider your municipalities' waste disposal practices when implementing your waste disposal strategy. (i.e., recycling, composting parameters).

Liquid waste must also be considered. If grease is used, it must be stored in a covered, non-flammable and durable container and disposed of by approved methods. Additionally, you may be required to install a grease trap.

### Supply of Potable Water

A continuous supply of hot and cold **potable water** under pressure is required when operating a food premises.

If your water is supplied with a source of water other than a municipal system (i.e., a well), you may be required to be registered as a [Small Drinking Water System](#) (SDWS). A WDG Public Health Inspector will provide more information if this is applicable to your food premises.

## Receiving Controls

In shared kitchen environments, having effective receiving controls to ensure food safety, quality, and inventory management is critical. This should be a shared responsibility between the owner and renter, but clear policies and procedures should be in place. The following is recommended:

### 1. Scheduled Deliveries

- Deliveries should be coordinated to minimize disruptions to food production and mitigate potential contamination risks. Additionally, they should be scheduled to ensure that personnel are available to receive and properly store products, particularly those requiring cold storage.

### 2. Visual Inspection

- Products should receive a visual inspection for package integrity (tears, dents), labelling (inspected sources), and signs of pest infestations (chew marks, droppings).

### 3. Rejection Procedures

- A clear procedure/policy should be in place for how to reject deliveries when there are concerns about quality and or contamination.

### 4. Labelling

- All food products used in a shared kitchen must be from inspected sources. Upon delivery, all food products will bear appropriate labelling.
- All products brought in and stored in the shared kitchen must be clearly labelled with the kitchen users name for identification purposes

## 5. Stock Rotation

- When stocking received items, it is important to use the older products first before the new items. Use the First In, First Out (FIFO) system.

## 6. Allergen Management

- When it is recommended to consider allergen control when products are received. Ensure there is a dedicated space for allergens and that those receiving and storing products are aware of cross contamination risks.

## Sinks

### Handwashing Sinks

At least one dedicated handwashing sink must be available in a food preparation area. The hand sink is required to have a continuous supply of hot and cold water under pressure, liquid soap in a dispenser, and paper towels. A handwashing sink is **only** used for handwashing.

### Food Preparation Sinks

It is strongly recommended to install a separate sink dedicated to food processing tasks. This sink would be used for washing produce, thawing food items, and cooling cooked food products using ice baths.

### Service Sink

Installing a conveniently located service sink or cleaning area with a floor drain, specifically for the needs of cleaning equipment, disposing of liquids and storage of cleaning supplies is recommended. It is important to consider the needs of the facility. For example, if you are primarily a facility where the use of rolling racks is heavily used (i.e. bakery), having a cleaning area equipped with a hose to spray down the rolling racks would be beneficial.

## Other Sinks

Depending on the needs of the facility, there may be a need for other sinks, such as:

- Dump Sink: Commonly used at service counters (i.e. bars & café areas)
- Dipper Well Sink: Commonly used for continuous use utensils (i.e. ice cream scoops)

## Sanitation

### Food Contact Surfaces

An approved sanitizing solution (bucket or spray bottle) must be available to sanitize food contact surfaces.

### Sanitizing Solutions

- Chlorine: 100 parts per million (ppm) (2ml or ½ teaspoon of household unscented chlorine bleach in 4 cups or 1 litre of water).
- Quaternary Ammonium: 200ppm
- Iodine: 25ppm
- If a bucket is used, wiping clothes must be stored in the sanitizing solution. An adequate supply of clean clothes must be provided.
- If a spray bottle is used, it must be clearly labelled, and a clean wiping cloth or disposable paper towels must be used.

Sanitizing solutions must be prepared daily and **tested daily** with a verification test strip to meet the minimum concentration requirements. Chlorine solution loses its effectiveness in an open container after 3 hours due to evaporation.

## **Dishwashing**

An appropriate form of dishwashing is required for all food premises. The use of a commercial dishwasher or 2 or 3 compartment sink is required.

### Dishwasher

The following is required if a dishwasher is utilized:

1. A chemical-based dishwasher (chlorine or iodine with test strips)
2. A high temperature dishwasher
3. A dedicated sink at the dishwasher for pre cleaning dishes is strongly recommended.

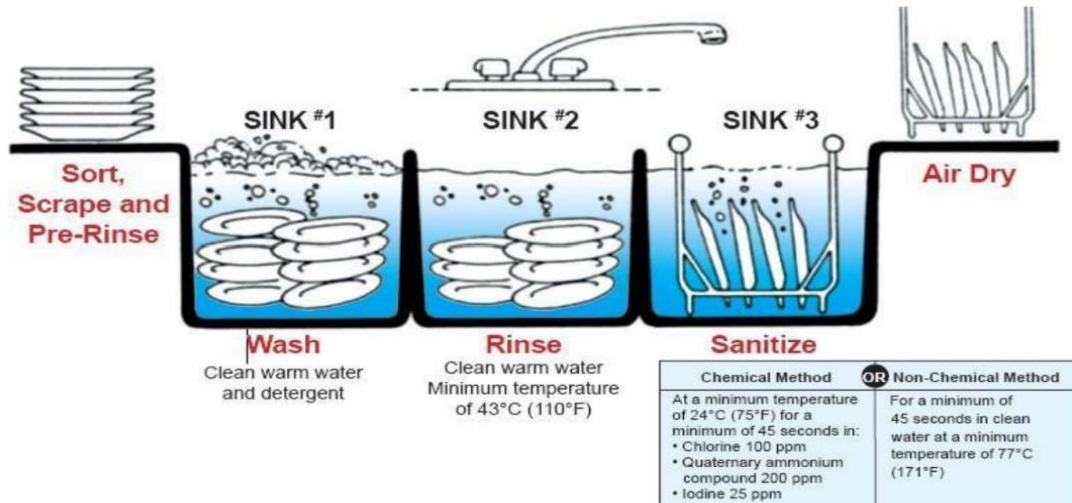
### Manual Dishwashing

Either a 2 compartment or 3 compartment sinks can be utilized for dishwashing depending on the type of food service.

### Three Compartment Sink

- A three-compartment sink includes 1 sink for washing with soap, 1 sink for rinsing with water, and 1 sink for sanitizing.
- A three-compartment sink is required if multi service utensils are used (glassware, service utensils, plates).
- It is recommended that a three-compartment sink is installed so the type of food service allowed is not limited in a shared kitchen. A three-compartment sink can also be utilized in the event the dishwasher is malfunctioning.

### 3-Compartment Sink Dishwashing Method



### Two Compartment Sink

- A two-compartment sink includes 1 sink for washing with soap and rinsing, 1 sink for sanitizing.
- A two-compartment sink can be used when **no** multiservice utensils are used (glassware, service utensils, plates)

### Product Storage

In a shared kitchen environment the dynamics of food storage are different due to the multiple renters utilizing the kitchen. Each renter will have specific storage needs and therefore tailored storage practices need to be implemented in a shared kitchen environment.

### Assigned Storage Areas

- Dedicated Space: Each renter needs to have dedicated shelves in fridges, freezers and dry storage to prevent cross contamination. Labelled sections with identifiers (i.e., name) are suggested.
- Separate Refrigerators/Freezers: If feasible, assign separate refrigeration to different food businesses or food types (e.g. vegetarian/vegan, gluten free) to prevent cross contamination.



## Labeling System

- User Specific Labels: Whether dedicated space can be allocated or not, having a user-specific label on each product item is recommended. Colour-Coded Labels for Allergies: To reduce the risk of cross contamination it is recommended that a colour coded system is put into place for dietary restrictions or allergen risks (e.g. blue label for dairy free, yellow for gluten free products).

## Kitchen Equipment Maintenance

In most cases it is the responsibility of the shared kitchen owner to maintain the provided kitchen equipment. Examples would include:

- fridges & freezers
- stove tops & ovens
- ventilation systems & dishwashers
- sinks & kitchen utensils

It is recommended that daily pre-operational checks are conducted to ensure the kitchen equipment is functional and in good repair. Implementing a log is encouraged.

## Preventative Maintenance (PM) Program

As part of maintaining the daily operations of the facility, it is recommended to have a preventive maintenance program. The principle of preventative maintenance is to replace, treat (i.e., lubricate) or inspect key equipment parts based on a pre-determined schedule before a part breaks down or deteriorates to the point of becoming a hazard. A Preventative Maintenance Program should consider:

### Past Equipment Failure History

Equipment that has a history of breakdowns should be inspected or addressed more frequently.

### **Scheduled Preventative Maintenance Activities**

Schedule activities based on manufacturer recommendations and/or based on historical failure frequency of the equipment.

Typically, dishwashers receive monthly checks by a technician, and ventilation cleanings are pre-scheduled at 6-month or yearly intervals. Establish strong relationships with reliable vendors and service providers. Having trusted partners can ensure timely and quality maintenance services.

### **Staff and Renter Training and Awareness**

Train facility staff and renters on the importance of preventative maintenance and how to identify potential issues. Regular training sessions or communications can help staff and facility renters recognize early signs of equipment failure.

### **Documentation and Record Keeping**

Maintain detailed records of all maintenance activities, including dates, tasks performed, and any issues found. This documentation can help track the performance of equipment over time and identify recurring problems.

A work order system can be used by kitchen renters and facility staff to submit when repairs are needed.

### **Inventory Management**

Keep an inventory of spare parts and essential maintenance supplies. Having these items readily available can reduce downtime when repairs are needed.

### **Emergency Procedures**

Develop and communicate clear procedures for handling equipment failures or emergencies. This can help minimize disruption to kitchen operations.

### **Cost Management**

Track maintenance costs and analyze them to identify cost-saving opportunities. Preventative maintenance can often reduce overall maintenance expenses by preventing major repairs.

## **Energy Efficiency**

Include checks for energy efficiency. Regular maintenance can help ensure that equipment operates efficiently, reducing energy consumption and costs.

## **Feedback Loop**

Create a feedback loop where kitchen renters and staff can report issues and suggest improvements to the preventative maintenance program. This can help continuously improve the effectiveness of the program.

## **Final Thoughts**

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Operating a shared kitchen requires collaboration, accountability and a commitment to safe food handling practices. Following this guidance document and working with WDG Public Health can result in a well-organized, safe and efficient environment. Everyone contributes by respecting the space, following policies and procedures, and maintaining high standards of cleanliness and hygiene.

A shared kitchen thrives on respect, and collaboration. When everyone plays their part, the kitchen becomes a functional and productive space that benefits all—whether by preventing foodborne illnesses or fostering a positive collaborative professional atmosphere. By working together and upholding these principles you help create a successful and sustainable shared kitchen environment.

## Resources

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### Wellington Dufferin Guelph Public Health Website

- [Notice of Intent to Operate a Food Premise Form](#)
- [Smart Start Package](#)
- [Small Drinking Water System Operators](#)
- [Food Premise Operators](#)

### Legislation

- [Health Protection and Promotion Act 1990](#)
- [Ontario Food Premises Regulation 493/17](#)
- [Small Drinking Water Systems Regulation 319/08](#)

# Any Questions?

Call Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph

Public Health

1-800-265-7293 ext. 4753