

The 'Winter Ready' Maintenance Guide for Mobile Businesses

Introduction

The event season has now drawn to an end and the inclement weather is taking its hold! Now that there are far fewer trading days, aside from a handful of glorious Christmas events, it may be time to carefully pack away your mobile trading unit until the Spring. Whilst doing so it is a good idea to review your maintenance arrangements and catch up on those jobs that you have been too busy over the summer to complete that could make all the difference next year.

So why not minimise the stress by proactively planning the maintenance arrangements for your business. Use the quieter times either side of the Christmas chaos to maintain the business unit and equipment - to minimise equipment failures, breakdowns and stress-inducing emergency repair issues that can inevitably arise during the busier times.

Consider this scenario - Your equipment has been in storage over the winter months, inactive or exposed to the elements, and you suddenly find yourself undertaking last-minute arrangements to trade at a really great event. It is at this point that you realise that key equipment no longer works as it should. The



result is ramped up stress levels and delays to your ability to kick start the event season and inevitably trade.

Be proactive rather than reactive! Review your maintenance arrangements at these key times:

Before Christmas – utilise the quieter times in the business to catch up, deep clean, repair and pack away after the main event season. Arrange your winter storage to make sure your vital equipment will be safe and secure, so you can relax and take a much-deserved break over the Christmas period.

After Christmas – whilst winter is still biting at the beginning of the year, use this time to ready the business to kick off the event season at the earliest opportunity by getting key equipment readied and carrying out checks to enable optimum service periods. Arrange any routine servicing and maintenance early and avoid leaving it to the last minute. Professional trades people e.g., plumbers, electricians and gas engineers also have seasonal peak periods in their work which often coincide with the hospitality sector. So just at the point when you need them to carry out services or repairs, so does everyone else! Plan ahead, if you think you are going to need a tradesperson don't leave it to the last minute!

Alternatively, the winter months may be an opportunity to try some new initiatives to support the business and to continue trading on a regular basis. This time could be used to research and implement new ideas. For example, trial new menu offerings, find new ways of trading, set up online sales and apply for new street trading permissions or licences. So, as well as catching up on the housekeeping why not consider some of our tips and ideas to winter trading and put them into practice. This may be the time to try a new approach.

We have outlined some proactive pre- and post-Christmas maintenance checks for you to consider in the business. Refer to the handy Maintenance Plans below which will allow you to highlight actions to prepare the business for winter storage and trading. It will also enable you to compile a trouble shooting guide for every eventuality.

As the maintenance needs and requirements for bricks and mortar sites and mobile businesses can differ, we have produced separate plans. The following checks relate to mobile catering or street food businesses. If you operate a bricks and mortar food business, please refer to the 'Winter Ready' Maintenance Guide for Bricks and Mortar Sites.

Maintenance Plan

Equipment or system	Type of check, inspection or works to be carried out.	Actions to be carried out	Tick if complete
<p>Winter Storage Arrangements</p> <p>Safe storage of LPG cylinders, gas appliances and electrical equipment</p> <p>Deep clean all areas</p>	<p>Use the 'quiet period' to catch up on all those big cleaning jobs and 'refresh' the mobile unit, gazebo and equipment etc. ready for the trading year ahead.</p> <p>Clean and repair gazebos that are subject to wear and tear.</p> <p>Consider hiring a steam cleaner to clean equipment and those hard-to-reach places.</p> <p>Remove accumulations of grease and dust from ceilings, walls, floor wall junctions and renew painted surfaces where applicable.</p> <p>Consider the types of complex equipment that are in use within the business that are not cleaned on a routine basis or require additional servicing by a suitable engineer. Arrange the cleaning and maintenance of this equipment e.g., extract canopy, ice cream machines, griddles and grills, espresso machines, vacuum packers.</p> <p>If everything is put away clean and in good repair, it will save time and problems ahead of the event season next year. It will also help to preserve the condition of your kit and equipment.</p> <p>If equipment is to be stored in a shed, garage or container unit then make sure this is clean and secure. Check storage areas for damp, leaks and pest activity. Make sure it is secure and is not vulnerable to deliberate tampering, vandalism or theft. Consider if work is required to renew and paint walls, deep clean and remove visible mould and where applicable, clean and renew shelving and racking systems.</p> <p>LPG cylinders, gas appliances and electrical equipment will need to be stored with extra care and consideration. For example, LPG cylinders will need to be secured in an upright position, in a well-ventilated space where they cannot be tampered with and are at least 1m away from combustible materials and ignition sources.</p>		

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<p>Vehicle Maintenance</p> <p><i>Applies to self-propelled catering vehicles, vehicles used to pull trailers and transport mobile catering equipment.</i></p> <p>Trailer Units</p> <p>Servicing / MOT</p> <p>Safety & Legal Compliance</p>	<p>Check when vehicle and trailer MOT and servicing is due so this can be scheduled with the least impact on trading arrangements.</p> <p>Regularly check your vehicle is safe to drive, especially if it has been inactive for some time. For example, checking all lights work, brakes work, as well as checking the levels of engine oil, water in the radiator, brake fluid levels.</p> <p>Tyres must have the correct depth and be free of cuts and defects. Check and replace tyres as necessary.</p> <p>Check windscreen and rear window washer bottles and top with windscreen washer as necessary.</p> <p>If trading over winter, ensure you have a supply of deicer and a window scraper.</p> <p>Trailer units should be checked to ensure they are safe and roadworthy. For example, rear lights, tyres, wheel brakes, ground supports, earthing, a frame and coupling locks.</p> <p>Is your driving license still in date or does it need renewing or updating?</p>		
<p>Gas installation</p> <p><i>Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) – making sure it is safely stored and used is essential.</i></p>	<p>LPG installations require an annual gas safety inspection carried out by a competent Gas Safe Engineer - refer to previous gas safety certificates to check if this inspection is now due and plan this work in for the year ahead. Consider setting a reminder nearer to the due date so you can guarantee the availability of your preferred Gas Safe Engineer.</p> <p>Gas Safe Engineers are registered as competent in different areas of activity and it is essential to make sure that an engineer is competent for the specific work required. For example, a gas engineer who can work on mains gas installations may not be able to work on LPG appliances and vice versa, always check with the engineer/outline the work that is required in advance. You can also check an engineer at the Gas Safe Register https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/find-an-engineer-or-check-the-register/check-an-engineer/</p> <p>Remember to retain the gas safety certificate as evidence that these important safety checks have been conducted.</p>		

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<p>Gas installation</p> <p>Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) – making sure it is safely stored and used is essential.</p>	<p>If you use LPG appliances infrequently, e.g., BBQs, make sure the LPG supply is safely stored over the winter months. The LPG cylinders should be stored outdoors or in well-ventilated storage units. They should be secured upright and should not be exposed to vandalism or tampering.</p>		
<p>Gas appliances</p> <p>For example, fryers, griddles, ovens, pizza ovens. Essential to catering operations so it is vital that they are properly maintained.</p> <p>Failure to properly maintain can result in significant harm e.g., fire, explosion, carbon monoxide poisoning.</p>	<p>Take some time to review the condition of the gas appliances in use. Suitable gas appliances should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CE or UKCA marked (is there data plate on the appliances?) • Have Flame Failure Devices (check this is working correctly) • Have individual isolation valves and where applicable are connected to an emergency isolation control point. • Kept clean with no obvious signs of wear and tear. • Installed with the correct hoses and joints or fixed and in good condition. • In vehicle units, appliances should be sited under an interlocked extraction canopy. <p>Flame Failure test – When the appliance is lit, turn of the gas at the isolation valve and LISTEN for the 'click' of the valve closing (takes about 60-90 seconds)</p> <p>Is the quality of the gas flame on the appliances satisfactory? It should be a light blue flame not a long yellow wavy visible flame.</p> <p>Have the appliances been serviced by a Gas Safe Engineer in the last 12 months? If this service is overdue or due over the Christmas period, or if any of the above matters have been highlighted, then make arrangements with a Gas Engineer now.</p> <p>Is there a carbon monoxide detector in place to provide early detection of a faulty gas appliance?</p>		

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<p>Generators</p> <p>Fueled by LPG, petrol or diesel</p>	<p>Keep your portable generator clean, covered and secure when not in use. Consider purchasing a weather resistant cover for the generator to keep it clean whilst in storage.</p> <p>Carefully drain any leftover fuel from the tank of the generators before it is packed away. Leaving fuel to idle in the tank can affect the efficiency and life of the generator. Store any leftover fuel safely in a suitable fuel container and away from ignitions sources.</p> <p>Routinely check on the generator during the winter months to make sure it is still secure and works.</p> <p>Check if the generator has appropriate Residual Current Device (RCD) protection. This will provide protection against accidental earthing of the system, for example, if the generator is sitting on wet ground, or if a cable fails.</p> <p>The generator should be routinely serviced by a competent engineer to change oil, filters, spark plugs etc. If using an LPG generator, then this will need to be serviced by a competent Gas Safe Engineer.</p> <p>Is it time to replace the generator? Is your current generator suitable for the energy demands required? Do you need to swap from a petrol or diesel generator to an LPG fueled generator? They are often quieter, can be safer and more energy efficient.</p>		
<p>Electrical appliances</p> <p><i>Faults in appliances, plugs or cables can result in equipment failure and serious accidents/injury.</i></p> <p>Portable Appliance Testing (PAT)</p> <p><i>The Electricity at Work Regulations 1989 require precautions to be taken to prevent the risk of death or personal injury from the use of electricity at work.</i></p>	<p>Visually check the electrical appliances in use throughout the business. Check for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damage to electrical plugs, sockets, and cables e.g., fraying, cuts • Coloured wires visible where the lead enters the plug • Burn marks or staining on the plug, lead or equipment indicate overheating • Damage to the equipment casing e.g., loose screws and parts • Evidence of poor storage e.g., water marks and dust layers <p>Remove from use any equipment that appears damaged. Do not risk electrocution. Repair or replace damaged equipment.</p>		

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<p>Water Systems</p> <p>Water heaters and pumps</p> <p>Water containers</p> <p>There must be an adequate supply of hot running water at sinks and wash hand basins to ensure hygiene standards and the safe production of food.</p> <p>Water used for food and drink preparation must be potable.</p>	<p>If packing away for winter, then drain water from pumped systems, containers and pipes. Avoid leaving stagnant water in the system.</p> <p>Water systems and equipment must be stored hygienically.</p> <p>Check water-heating systems and pumped systems are working correctly. If there have been any recent failures or disruption with these essential systems, then get them checked out by a competent engineer. Don't leave matters until complete failure of the system occurs and you end up with no hot water for washing up or hand washing.</p> <p>If there has been a period of inactivity flush through taps and pipework. Chlorinate/disinfect water containers and flush through pipework.</p> <p>Replenish your stocks of chlorine based sterilant e.g., Chemtabs, Aquachlor.</p> <p>Check the condition and suitability of water containers. Do the external surfaces and lids need cleaning, do the lids still fit tightly, are they suitable to prevent algae growth?</p>		

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<p>Water Systems</p> <p>Water heaters and pumps</p> <p>Water containers</p> <p>There must be an adequate supply of hot running water at sinks and wash hand basins to ensure hygiene standards and the safe production of food.</p> <p>Water used for food and drink preparation must be potable.</p>	<p>Do you have enough suitable wastewater containers for your handwashing and sink stations?</p> <p>For more information refer to Section 05 Food Business Water Supply of the NCASS Safety Management System.</p>		
<p>Catering Equipment</p> <p>For example, bain-maries, refrigerators, freezers</p> <p>Important equipment that is key to providing optimum service to customers. Make sure it won't let you down when you need it most!</p>	<p>Invest the time checking everything is working correctly and carry out any relevant maintenance that will enable this equipment to work at its optimum/most energy efficient. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean the condenser coils on the refrigerators and freezers which can be located via the back panel – removing dust and dirt with a hoover. • Remove accumulated ice from freezers – a build-up of ice makes the appliance less efficient and takes up storage space. • Preheat/test warming equipment (e.g., bain-maries and plate warmers) that may have had no use for some time. • Check equipment with the potential to leak onto the floor e.g., deep fat fryers, steamers – checking for and resolving any leaks. • Check guards on meat slicers and dough mixers – these should be interlocked so if they become faulty it will not be possible to use the equipment. • Check door seals on refrigerators and freezers – clean and repair where necessary. • Clean filters and change the oil in fryers. 		

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<p>Pressure Systems</p> <p>For example, coffee espresso machines, pressure fryers and cookers.</p> <p>If a pressurised system fails, they can seriously injure or kill people and cause serious damage to property.</p>	<p>Check these systems are working correctly and if in doubt arrange for them to be repaired by a competent engineer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the systems are CE or UKCA marked • Know the safe operating limits and check the system is working within these limits – if in doubt refer to the manufacturers handbook • Set up a suitable maintenance programme in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. <p>A written scheme of examination should be in place, carried out by a competent person. For example, for espresso coffee machines it is recommended that the examination is conducted every 14 months. If this has not been undertaken or is overdue then make these arrangements without further delay.</p>		
<p>Extraction and ventilation systems</p> <p>This is critical to maintaining safe and healthy air quality in catering areas. Extraction systems are usually comprised of a canopy and filters, a mechanical fan and ducting. All parts are to be cleaned and maintained on a regular basis to ensure the business has a fully operational extraction system as required by law.</p>	<p>In permanent structures e.g., vehicle units, the extract ventilation system should be interlocked with the gas supply to appliances. So, if the ventilation system fails it could prevent use of the gas appliances. Systems should be maintained in line with the manufacturers/installers' instructions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check the canopy and filters – ensure they been cleaned; accumulations of grease residue should be removed to prevent a loss of efficiency and increased risk of fire. • Consider if the system is quiet and vibration free – check for disruption on the mechanical fan, a loose part or the canopy becoming detached from the wall. • Are cooking appliances properly situated under the canopy and is the system efficiently extracting fumes and heat – an indication that this is not working effectively is recurring accumulations of grease on walls, ceilings, and surfaces throughout the catering areas. <p>Consider having spare parts in place for the extract ventilation system e.g., spare filters, a replacement fan. This should make it easier to facilitate repairs.</p>		

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<p>Fire fighting equipment</p> <p><i>Fire extinguishing appliances require regular maintenance and inspection to be undertaken and recorded by a competent engineer, to ensure that they will not let you down in an emergency.</i></p>	<p>Consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there adequate provision of equipment - are the correct fire extinguishers in place for the types of fuel in use e.g., electrical equipment, gas appliances, deep fat fryers, wood fired pizza ovens. Fire blankets are also to be considered. • Are they readily accessible and unobstructed? • Are they suitably sited with wall signage in place? • Check they have not been used or subject to tampering or vandalism. • Have staff been trained in the use of this equipment? • Check the expiry date on fire extinguishers and replace any that have expired. • Check when extinguishers were last serviced and if overdue or due shortly then arrange servicing. <p>Provide relevant equipment and ensure it is in good working order.</p>		
<p>Emergency Contacts List</p> <p><i>This will really come in handy and will save you wasting time when in a rush to find contacts that you can call on. This will really come in handy and will save you wasting time when in a rush to find contacts that you can call on.</i></p>	<p>Compile a list of emergency repair contacts that can be referred to in case of a sudden equipment breakdown. For example, the contact details for a reputable and competent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electrician • Gas Safe Engineer • Plumber • Drinks Dispenser Engineer • Kitchen Appliance Engineer • Locksmith • Window glazer • Pest Control Contractor • As well as the contacts for your utility providers e.g., water, gas, electricity, LPG supplier, communications (phone, WiFi). <p>Whilst business owners and general managers may have many of these contacts already saved into their phone, junior managers, supervisors etc. may not and could be the ones dealing with an emergency repair situation. We recommend that you insert this list into the Safety Management System folder for easy reference and ensure staff know where to locate it should they need to make the call.</p>		

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<p>Safety Management System</p> <p><i>Review and update procedures and risk assessments</i></p> <p><i>Catch up on or complete outstanding training.</i></p>	<p>This could be good time to really get to grips with the NCASS Safety Management ahead of your next routine food safety inspection. Take the time to review the risk assessments and check if the correct controls will be implemented in real life. That way what is written down will properly reflect the business practices and procedures. If changing the way you work or introducing new processes, then first review the relevant information in the safety management system to ensure you are on the right track. If you have any outstanding training to complete, why not finish this training now and then this will be another string to your bow. The matters learnt could really come in handy when you are busy again later. Why not look at some of the new NCASS online courses that are on offer and expand your current compliance qualifications.</p> <p>Update your training records to reflect the training undertaken by staff. Consider completing the handy Training Matrix template in the Safety Management System to reflect everyone's time and effort and have this evidence summary available to support routine inspections and event applications.</p>		
<p>Pest Control</p> <p><i>High standards of pest control play a key part in providing a safe food environment. Ensure that adequate steps have been taken to control pests and meet legal requirements.</i></p>	<p>Are your routine checks up to date? Have all areas been checked for pest activity recently?</p> <p>Inclement weather will see pests move indoors if they can, so be extra cautious.</p> <p>Check for access points- gaps and holes around doors, windows, and drains of mobile catering units and storage facilities. Over time holes can appear in building materials that can provide access to pests either through accidental damage, wear and tear or by the pests themselves gnawing and chewing.</p>		

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<p>List here any other relevant maintenance tasks to be undertaken</p>	<p>Consider if other maintenance arrangements need to be planned for. The following examples have been given:</p> <p>Cleaning and renewing signage and A-boards</p> <p>Replacing uniforms and aprons</p> <p>Checking the food hygiene rating window stickers, allergen signage etc. are still on display</p> <p>Add to this list as applicable:</p>		

Winter Trading Plan

Winter Trading	Things to Consider	Actions to be carried out.
<p>Permissions and Licenses</p> <p>Street Trading</p> <p>Alcohol licenses</p> <p>Late Night Refreshment</p>	<p>Street Trading Are there street trading consents that need to be renewed or new applications that can be made?</p> <p>Are there new trading pitches that could be applied for? A new site in a layby, park or town centre that could bring better business than previous sites - it may be worth enquiring with the relevant local authority if this space is available. It is worth taking a good look at the space considering accessibility, safety, nearby facilities and footfall. Take some photos and provide exact details of the location to support your enquiry to the local authority. Could you trade from the space outside of your home e.g., on your driveway or street? Always check with the local authority if permission is required first and that this won't impact neighbouring properties etc., but if it can be done safely and legally, then arrange some advertising and promote the days you will be trading and set up an ordering service for local customers to call and collect.</p> <p>Selling Alcohol Check when personal licenses are due for renewal. Consider when Temporary Event Notice (TEN) applications will need to be made for relevant events and trading days. Start the applications early to ensure meeting the deadlines outlined by the local authority.</p> <p>The number of TENs you can apply for will depend on whether or not you have a Personal License. If you don't already sell alcohol, consider adding this to your offering. There will be specific conditions to meet and applications to be made, but once done it will add another string to your bow.</p> <p>Late Night Refreshment It may be worth extending the trading hours to coincide with Christmas party nights and busier footfall on the high street and within the late-night economy. Just remember that if you are going to sell hot food after 11pm then you will require a late-night refreshment license or TEN from the local authority, don't leave the application too late.</p>	

Winter Trading	Things to Consider	Actions to be carried out.
<p>Be Application Ready</p> <p>Start event applications early.</p> <p>Check deadlines.</p> <p>Check the conditions and requirements for supporting documentation</p>	<p>Consider listing all the event dates that you would like to apply for this year and start reviewing the application processes and conditions to trade now, along with the application deadlines. This will help you to create a timeline for the application processes.</p> <p>Prepare the supporting documents now so you can be sure to meet the requirements and not miss the deadlines for applications. Event organisers may ask for specific supporting documentation that you currently do not have prepared. It's worth getting a head start on this as leaving it to the last minute to find a solution to these requirements can be stressful.</p> <p>Try researching events that you have not traded at before and commit to more dates in the trading diary than last year. Don't forget to check the 'Work Opportunities' area of the NCASS member dashboard for event organisers that are recruiting traders for their events.</p> <p>Consider how you could adapt the business set-up to attend some smaller artisan indoor events e.g., Christmas fayres and craft markets and start applying now.</p>	
<p>Site Sharing & Partnerships</p> <p>New opportunities for revenue</p> <p>Flex from mobile to fixed site premises</p>	<p>Consider working with a local pub that does not currently have a food offering or that may be struggling to find staff to continue providing a food service. This could be either working within their kitchen facilities or trading from the car park or beer garden. The businesses would be run separately but would be mutually beneficial. If trading from the car park and drawing trade from off the street, then you may require street trading consent but always check with the local authority first. Having a trading consent should then give you the opportunity to pick up more trade.</p> <p>There may be opportunities to explore with local schools or residential care homes to provide contact catering or to support festive events.</p> <p>Could you do some event catering? For example, working with local workplaces to cater for their Christmas office party. Many workplaces are looking to host Christmas events on site to reduce costs as opposed to hiring event sites. You could help them create a themed event based around your food offering.</p>	

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<p>Review the Menu Offering</p> <p>New Menus</p> <p>Diversifying to Pre-packed Foods</p>	<p>Try changing the menu. Offer some novel seasonal foods to help you stand out and reinvigorate trading over the winter months. Remember, if selling mulled wine at Christmas you will require a license/TEN for the relevant trading days.</p> <p>Use these quieter months to research and trial a new menu offering that could be put into practice in the busier trading times.</p> <p>Consider pre-packaging some of your offerings. For example, if you prepare sauces, preserves or baked goods could these be bottled or packaged and sold at markets, online or through retailers? Just remember to make sure they are properly labelled and specified food allergens are highlighted.</p>	
<p>Emergency Catering Services</p> <p>Opportunities for additional revenue</p>	<p>NCASS has an agreement to provide hot food and drinks to the customers of utility providers and distributors (utility companies), impacted by a power outage or in the form of an emergency. NCASS subcontracts this service to NCASS members. Look out for text messages that alert members to Emergency Catering Work opportunities. It is a good opportunity for additional revenue.</p>	
<p>Go Digital & Sell Online</p> <p>Website</p> <p>Social Media</p> <p>Meeting Platforms</p>	<p>Consider creating a website to promote the business, advertise and offer online sales and deliveries.</p> <p>Develop social media platforms to promote the business and engage with customers on a regular basis.</p> <p>Get familiar with online meeting solutions such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams so you can remotely meet with customers, event organisers and local authority officers, to better engage on behalf of the business.</p>	

Winter Trading	Things to Consider	Actions to be carried out.
<p>Be More Environmentally Friendly</p> <p><i>Plastic Packaging Ban</i></p> <p><i>Sustainability Policy</i></p>	<p>The single use plastic package ban comes into force on 1st October 2023. Businesses will no longer be able to sell single-use plastic cutlery, balloon sticks, polystyrene cups, food containers, plastic plates, trays and bowls. As you will no longer be able to source these items, make sure you are prepared and have found suitable alternatives.</p> <p>Consider how you can make your business more environmentally sustainable. Event organizers are often looking for niche traders who offer sustainable services. They often have sustainability targets to meet for their events so will want to recruit those traders who have their own policies. For example, using local supplies and seasonal products to reduce carbon emissions, using solar panels or biofuels, using compostable utensils or reusables.</p> <p>Could this be your selling point? If you are already doing your bit, then find a way to shout about it!</p>	

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