

**WAC 458-20-119 Sales by caterers and food service contractors.**

(1) **Introduction.** This rule explains Washington's business and occupation (B&O) tax and retail sales tax applications for sales by caterers and food service contractors.

(a) **Examples.** This rule contains examples that identify a number of facts and then state a conclusion. These examples should be used only as a general guide. The tax results of other situations must be determined after a review of all facts and circumstances.

(b) **Other rules that may apply.** The following rules may contain additional relevant information:

(i) WAC 458-20-107 Requirement to separately state sales tax—Advertised prices including sales tax.

(ii) WAC 458-20-124 Restaurants, cocktail bars, taverns and similar businesses.

(iii) WAC 458-20-166 Hotels, motels, boarding houses, rooming houses, resorts, hostels, trailer camps, short-term rentals and similar lodging businesses.

(iv) WAC 458-20-167 Educational institutions, school districts, student organizations, and private schools.

(v) WAC 458-20-168 Hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, adult family homes and similar health care facilities.

(vi) WAC 458-20-175 Persons engaged in the business of operating as a private or common carrier by air, rail or water in interstate or foreign commerce.

(vii) WAC 458-20-189 Sales to and by the state of Washington and municipal corporations, including counties, cities, towns, school districts, and fire districts.

(viii) WAC 458-20-190 Sales to and by the United States and certain entities created by the United States—Doing business on federal reservations—Sales to foreign governments.

(ix) WAC 458-20-244 Food and food ingredients.

(2) **Sales by caterers.** Sales of meals and prepared food by caterers are subject to the retailing B&O and retail sales taxes when sold to consumers. "Caterer" means a person who provides, prepares, and serves meals for immediate consumption at a location selected by the customer. The tax liability is the same whether the meals are prepared at the customer's site or the caterer's site. The retailing B&O and retail sales taxes also apply when caterers prepare and serve meals using ingredients provided by the customer.

(3) **Food service contractors.** The term "food service contractor" means a person who operates a food service at a kitchen, cafeteria, dining room, or similar facility owned by an institution or business. Food service contractors may manage the food service operation on behalf of the institution or business, or may actually make sales of meals or prepared foods.

(a) **Sales of meals.** Food service contractors who sell meals or prepared foods to consumers are subject to the retailing B&O and retail sales taxes on their gross proceeds of sales. For example, the operation of a cafeteria which provides meals to employees of a manufacturing or financial business is generally a retail activity. The food service contractor is considered to be making retail sales of meals, whether payment for the meal is made by the employees or the business, unless the business itself is reselling the meals to the employees.

In all cases where the meals are prepared at off-site facilities not owned by the institution or business, the food service contractor

is considered to be making sales of meals and the retailing B&O and retail sales taxes apply to the gross proceeds of sale, or gross income for sales to consumers.

(b) **Food service management.** The gross proceeds derived from the management of a food service operation are subject to the service and other business activities B&O tax. These tax reporting provisions apply whether the staff actually preparing the meals or prepared foods is employed by the institution or business hiring the food service contractor, or by the food service contractor itself. If the food service contractor merely manages the food service operation on behalf of an institution or business, that institution or business is considered to be selling meals or providing the meals as a part of the services the institution or business renders to its customers. These institutions and businesses should refer to subsections (4) and (5) in this rule to determine their B&O tax and retail sales tax liabilities.

Food service management includes, but is not limited to, the following activities:

(i) Food service contractors operating a cafeteria or similar facility which provides meals and prepared food for employees or guests of a business, but only where the business owning the facility is the one actually selling the meals to its employees.

(ii) Food service contractors managing or operating a cafeteria, lunch room, or similar facility for the exclusive use of students or faculty at an educational institution or private school. The educational institution or private school provides these meals to the students and faculty as a part of its educational services. The food service contractor is managing a food service operation on behalf of the institution, and is not making retail sales of meals to the students, faculty, or institution. Sales of meals or prepared foods to guests in such areas are, however, subject to the retailing B&O and retail sales taxes.

(iii) Food service contractors managing or operating the dietary facilities of a hospital, nursing home, or similar institution, for the purpose of providing meals or prepared foods to its patients or residents. These meals are provided to the patients or residents by the hospital, nursing home, or similar institution as a part of the services rendered by the institution. The food service contractor is managing a food service operation on behalf of the institution, and is not considered to be making retail sales of meals to the patients, residents, or institution. Sales of meals to doctors, nurses, visitors, and other employees through a cafeteria or similar facility are, however, subject to the retailing B&O and retail sales taxes.

(c) **Examples.**

(i) Example 1. GC Inc. is a food service contractor managing and operating an on-site cafeteria for B College. This cafeteria is operated for the exclusive use of students and faculty. Guests of students or faculty members, however, are allowed to use the facilities. All moneys collected in the cafeteria are retained by B College. B College pays GC's direct costs for managing and operating the cafeteria, including the costs of the unprepared food products, employee salaries, and overhead expenses. GC also receives a management fee.

GC Inc. is managing a food service operation. The measure of tax is the gross proceeds received from B College. GC Inc. may not claim a deduction on account of cost of materials, salaries, or any other expense. GC Inc.'s proceeds are subject to the service and other activities B&O tax classification. B College is considered to be making retail sales of meals to the guests and must collect and remit retail

sales tax on the gross proceeds of these sales. B College should refer to WAC 458-20-167 to determine whether the retailing B&O tax applies.

(ii) Example 2. DF Food Service contracts with Hospital A to manage and operate Hospital A's dietary and cafeteria facilities. DF is to receive a per meal fee for meals provided to Hospital A's patients. DF Food Service retains all proceeds for sales of meals to physicians, nurses, and visitors in the cafeteria.

The gross proceeds received from Hospital A regarding the meals provided to the patients are derived from the management of a food service operation. These proceeds are subject to the service and other activities B&O tax classification. DF, however, is making retail sales of meals to physicians, nurses, and visitors in the cafeteria. DF Food Service must pay retailing B&O tax, and collect and remit retail sales tax, on the gross proceeds derived from the cafeteria sales.

(4) **Retailing B&O and retail sales taxes.** The sales of meals to consumers are subject to the retailing B&O tax and generally subject to retail sales tax. However, a retail sales tax exemption is available for the following sales of meals:

(a) Prepared meals sold under a state-administered nutrition program for the aged as provided for in the Older Americans Act (Public Law 95-478 Title III) and RCW 74.38.040(6);

(b) Prepared meals sold to or for senior citizens, disabled persons, or low-income persons by a nonprofit organization organized under chapter 24.03A or 24.12 RCW. However, this exemption does not apply to purchases of prepared meals by nonprofit organizations, such as hospitals, which provide the meals to patients as a part of the services they render;

(c) Food, drink, or meals furnished by a senior living community, as defined in RCW 82.04.040, to tenants as part of a rental or residency agreement for which no separate charge is made, regardless of whether the tenant is a resident for purposes of chapter 18.20 or 18.390 RCW. RCW 82.04.040; and

(d) Prepared meals sold to the federal government. WAC 458-20-190. However, meals sold to federal employees are taxable, even if the federal employee will be reimbursed for the cost of the meals by the federal government.

(5) **Wholesale sales of prepared meals.** Persons making sales of prepared meals to persons who will be reselling the meals are subject to the wholesaling B&O tax classification. Sellers must obtain a reseller permit for sales from their customers to document the wholesale nature of any sale as provided in WAC 458-20-102 Reseller permits.

(6) **Deferred sales or use tax.** If the seller fails to collect the appropriate retail sales tax, the purchaser is required to pay the deferred sales or use tax directly to the department for many catering and food service items, as follows:

(a) Purchases of dishes, kitchen utensils, linens, and items which do not become an ingredient of the meal, are subject to retail sales tax.

(b) Retail sales tax or use tax applies to purchases of equipment, repairs, appliances, and construction.

(c) Retail sales tax or use tax does not apply to purchases of food or beverage products that are ingredients of meals being sold at retail or wholesale.

(d) Purchases of food products and prepared meals by persons who are not in the business of selling meals at retail or wholesale are subject to the retail sales tax. However, certain food products are exempt from retail sales or use tax. See WAC 458-20-244.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 82.01.060 and 82.32.300. WSR 24-03-129, § 458-20-119, filed 1/22/24, effective 2/22/24; WSR 22-14-014, § 458-20-119, filed 6/23/22, effective 7/24/22. Statutory Authority: RCW 82.32.300, 82.01.060(2), and 2011 c 55. WSR 12-07-060, § 458-20-119, filed 3/19/12, effective 4/19/12. Statutory Authority: RCW 82.32.300, 82.01.060(2), chapters 82.04, 82.08, 82.12 and 82.32 RCW. WSR 10-06-069, § 458-20-119, filed 2/25/10, effective 3/28/10. Statutory Authority: RCW 82.32.300. WSR 99-11-107, § 458-20-119, filed 5/19/99, effective 6/19/99; WSR 93-23-019, § 458-20-119, filed 11/8/93, effective 12/9/93; WSR 86-03-016 (Order ET 86-1), § 458-20-119, filed 1/7/86; WSR 82-16-061 (Order ET 82-7), § 458-20-119, filed 7/30/82. Statutory Authority: RCW 82.01.060(2) and 82.32.300. WSR 78-07-045 (Order ET 78-4), § 458-20-119, filed 6/27/78; Order ET 74-1, § 458-20-119, filed 5/7/74; Order ET 70-3, § 458-20-119 (Rule 119), filed 5/29/70, effective 7/1/70.]