

Getting Started in Business

Where Do You Start? The City or the County?

Both the city of Ridgecrest and Kern County have planning departments, building departments, and licensing departments. If your business will be inside the city limits, the city will control most of your requirements and the county will control some of them. In that case, the city would be the best place to start.

If your business will be in an unincorporated area (outside the city limits), you will be subject to county requirements and may have city requirements as well. Typically, the county controls health and food permits. If you will deliver goods or services to people inside the city limits, you will need a city business license, regardless of where your business will be.

Usually, businesses located outside the city limits need licenses only for activities that could be hazardous or disruptive to the public. Check with Kern County Sheriff to find out if your business requires any special permit or license. (Kern County: 661-391-7690)

Since our valley is located near the intersections of three counties (Kern, Inyo, and San Bernardino), even which county to deal with can sometimes be confusing. Businesses located on County Line Road, for example, need to deal with Kern County if they're on the west side of the road and with San Bernardino County if they're on the east side.

Zoning Requirements

The first step toward establishing your business should be to verify that your planned use and location will comply with zoning regulations. When you apply for your business license with the City of Ridgecrest, the process includes a check with Zoning and Building to be sure you are in compliance. **It's important to verify that your plans comply with city requirements BEFORE you sign a lease or purchase major equipment.**

Who to contact City of Ridgecrest Community and Economic Development Dept.
100 W. California Ave., Ridgecrest, CA 93555
760-371-3721

What to do Call to verify that your proposed use and location comply with zoning requirements. To request a copy of the restrictions and allowances for your business location, call the City Clerk at 371-3751 and ask for the pertinent section of the Ridgecrest Municipal Code.

If your proposed use and location comply, consider the specific requirements for home businesses and home daycare providers, then go on to the next step.

If the proposed use and location don't comply, you may be able to apply for a conditional use permit, a site plan review, or a zone change. Ask staff members at the Community and Economic Development Dept. about the information they need from you, the approximate cost, the estimated time the permit or review will take, and the likelihood that your special use will be approved.

Be sure to ask which Planning Commission and/or City Council meeting you will be required to attend.

Fictitious Business Name Statement

If your business will operate under any name other than that of the owner, you must file a Fictitious Business Name form and publicize the fictitious name within 40 days after starting business. To avoid confusion, you should file the form before your business opens. After you file the form, publish the statement in a local newspaper once a week for four weeks. The newspaper will send proof of publication to the County Clerk.

Who to contact Kern County Clerk's Desk
District Attorney's Office
128 E. Coso St., Ridgecrest, CA 93555
760-384-5821 661-868-3588 800-552-5376

Sign Ordinance

The city's sign ordinance addresses two concerns: general appearance and public safety. To ensure that your signs are in compliance with city standards, you are required to obtain a sign permit and a building permit whenever you install, move, or replace an outdoor sign.

All business signs must be approved by the Community and Economic Development Dept. The number and size of signs allowed often depend on your total building street frontage. You'll need to find out about Ridgecrest sign requirements before you spend any money on signage. Please note too, that home businesses are not allowed to display business signs.

Who to contact: City of Ridgecrest Community and Economic Development Dept.
100 W. California Ave., Ridgecrest, CA 93555
760-371-3721

What to do: Before you invest any money in signage, measure your building street frontage, then call the Community and Economic Development Dept. and ask for the requirements pertaining to the following:

- Number of signs permitted
- Size of each sign
- Maximum height of each sign
- Total sign allotment
- Placement
- Design and color restrictions

Pick up a sign permit application from the Community and Economic Development Dept. The application will let you know what documentation to provide. Most applications require plans and specifications, color and material descriptions, approval of the building's owner, etc.

Before you construct your sign, submit the completed application (with your fee) to the Community and Economic Development Dept. Ask how long the approval process will take, what meeting(s) you may need to attend, and what other information is necessary for you to gain approval.

Once your permit is approved, find out from the Building Inspection Division if you need a building permit to install the sign.

With those steps taken and the permit (if you need it) in place, you can construct, install, and call for inspection on your sign.

Other Building and Equipment Permits

Because of the city's responsibility for public safety, new businesses are required to have many types of permits. Before you begin any remodeling or even simple rearranging (of signs, planters, etc.), call the City of Ridgecrest Building Inspection Div. to find out what permits are necessary, what those permits will cost, and what procedures to follow to obtain them.

Who to contact for building, electrical, and plumbing permits City of Ridgecrest Building Inspection Div.
100 W. California Ave., Ridgecrest, CA 93555
760-371-3669

Who to contact for fire permits and information Kern County Fire Dept.
760-375-8466

What to do Ask the Fire Dept. about requirements for fire extinguishers, fire exits, and storage for flammable materials.

If you plan to renovate or use existing equipment, talk to the Building Inspection Div. before you lease space or begin conducting business. Find out about any hidden requirements, such as those involving bringing the building up to code. You don't want to be like the business owner who wanted to upgrade a sink, only to learn that the authorities were requiring new flooring, electrical changes, and an entrance for the handicapped!

Don't assume that because your predecessor used existing equipment, you can too. City and/or county officials may require upgrades before they issue occupancy permits.

Environmental Health Permit – Food Program

If your business will sell or handle food, obtain a permit from the Kern County Environmental Health Services Dept. You cannot sell food prepared in your home. This rule applies to caterers, as well as to individuals, clubs, and businesses. **WARNING: The regulations for selling and handling food are extensive and precise. Do not sign a lease or buy your food-handling equipment until you have talked with all the organizations discussed below.**

Who to contact Kern County Environmental Health Services Dept.
2700 M. St., Suite 300, Bakersfield, CA 93301
661-862-8700 800-552-5376

A representative is in Ridgecrest on Tues., Wed., and Thurs. mornings at
400 N. China Lake Blvd., Ridgecrest CA 93555 760-384-5838

What to do Don't make the mistake of assuming that you can continue to prepare or sell food in a facility that is being used for that purpose today. Before you sign a lease or take any other major step toward establishing your business, call the Environmental Health Services Dept. and ask for a walk-through. Someone from that department can advise you on whether the equipment and facility are generally acceptable. Ask also to see the county's files on your planned facility to learn about past violations or problems.

Before you can get a food permit, you must submit a plan to Environmental Health Services for approval.

1. Check city or county zoning to make sure your planned use is approved.

2. Determine what food you want to sell (or handle). The exact type of food you will be serving determines the requirements you must meet. Remember that the regulations are extensive and precise!

After you collect the above information, create and submit your plan:

1. Call Environmental Health Services and get a copy of the regulations for the type of food establishment that serves your specific type of food.
2. Prepare a complete, detailed plan showing the equipment (including model numbers) and materials you will use to finish floors, walls, ceilings, plumbing, electricity, ventilation, and so forth. Talk to officials at Environmental Health Services to make sure your plan includes all the details they need.
3. Submit your plan to Environmental Health Services for approval.
4. Pay fees to the county for the plan check the county requires. County charges may vary, but \$80 per hour is typical. You may have to pay an advance deposit (\$350 to \$485).

You will pay an annual health permit fee for the food permit and inspection services. The county will inspect your business at least three times a year. Permit fees will depend on the size of your business. The nonrefundable permit is valid only for the type of food sales or food preparation approved at the time the health permit was issued, and the fee is due on July 1 every year. Display the permit in a prominent place in your business, and if the permit is suspended or revoked, you must close your business until you again have a valid permit.

In addition to the Food Permit for your premises, any food facility that prepares or serves unpackaged food must have a **certified food safety person** (certified food handler). The information for this certification is also available through Kern County Environmental Health Services Department.

What other approvals to get

Once your plan is approved by Environmental Health, get building, electrical, and plumbing approvals from the City of Ridgecrest Building Dept., 760-371-3780. Kern County Fire Dept., 760-375-8466, and from the Kern County Resource Management Agency, Waste Management Dept., 661-862-8900, especially if your food operation will discard large amounts of grease or other materials

Special Permit – Alcohol Sales

In order to sell alcoholic beverages, you will need a special permit from the state.

Who to contact California Dept of Alcoholic Beverage Control
4800 Stockdale Hwy., Suite 213
Bakersfield, CA 93309
661-395-2731 www.abc.ca.gov/

Weights and Measures

If your business will weigh or measure items, you will need to learn about county requirements.

Who to contact Kern County Weights & Measures Dept.
1116 E. California Ave.
Bakersfield, CA 93307
800-552-5376 toll-free www-co.kern.ca.us/weights/kerncounty.html

Regulatory Requirements

Before you begin your business, call or visit the Building Department to find out about any special regulatory requirements. Examples include parking regulations and bans on certain types of hazardous materials.

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| <i>Who to contact</i> | City of Ridgecrest Building Dept. 100 W. California Ave., Ridgecrest, CA 93555 760-371-3780 |
| <i>What to do</i> | Ask for information about special regulatory requirements affecting your new business. |

Basic Services

Once you have the permits and licenses you need, you'll be ready to turn on your utilities and establish your basic services. Here's information on where to call for some of the services you will need.

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| <i>Cable TV and Internet Service</i> | Mediacom 543 Inyokern Rd., Ridgecrest, CA 93555 760-446-5536 |
| <i>Electricity</i> | Southern California Edison Co. 510 S. China Lake Blvd., Ridgecrest, CA 93555 800-684-8123 |
| <i>Gas</i> | Pacific Gas and Electric 530 S. China Lake Blvd., Ridgecrest, CA 93555 800-743-5000 |
| <i>Internet Service</i> | IWV Internet Service Provider 760-446-5006 support@iwvisp.com Ridgenet 760-375-6700 |
| <i>Telephone and DSL Service</i> | Verizon 800-483-4000 (residential) 800-483-1000 (repair) 800-483-5000 (commercial) |
| <i>Trash Removal</i> | Ridgecrest Sanitation 237 San Bernardino Blvd., Ridgecrest, CA 93555 760-375-8495 |
| <i>Sewer</i> | City of Ridgecrest Building Dept. 100 W. California Ave., Ridgecrest CA 93555 760-371-3780 |
| <i>Water</i> | Indian Wells Valley Water District 500 W. Ridgecrest Blvd., Ridgecrest, CA 93555 760-375-5086 |