

# CFIA Fish Processing Regulatory Overview

Thinking about starting a seafood processing business in Canada? If you plan to cut (e.g., skin, fillet, trim), cook, freeze, package, or store seafood to sell it, you will need a licence. Before you apply, there are important things to think about and prepare. Start by thinking about what type of seafood you will prepare and sell. Will it be fresh fish, shellfish, or seaweed? Will you be freezing, drying, salting, smoking or cooking it? Where will the processing happen? Where do you plan to sell and ship? Will you export? You'll need to know these details to get the right licence and design your setup properly.

## WHY LICENSING MATTERS

If you're starting a seafood processing business in Canada, there are two levels of compliance to consider: provincial/territorial and federal. While your provincial/territorial jurisdiction will handle your facility licensing, you must also comply with federal requirements outlined in the Safe Food for Canadians Regulations (SFCR). These are enforced by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), the federal body responsible for ensuring food in Canada is safe to eat. The SFCR establishes clear rules to protect public health by making sure seafood is safe, clean, traceable, and handled safely during processing and selling domestically or internationally. By following these regulations and obtaining your CFIA licence, you can confidently grow your business and sell your products with peace of mind.

## SETTING UP YOUR FACILITY

What You Need	Considerations
<b>Facility Plan</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A drawing of your space, outlining materials and equipment used to demonstrate your facility is safe for food.</li><li>• This drawing should be reviewed by a food safety consultant prior to beginning the construction phase to ensure all food safety requirements are included (i.e., traffic flows, coolers, freezer, drains, hand wash sinks, etc.)</li><li>• You will need an up-to-date facility drawing once construction is finished and it will need to be accessible to inspectors.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Water source</b> – Must be potable. Municipal water, seawater, and ice require at minimum annual testing, while well water requires at minimum quarterly testing for E. coli and coliforms.</li><li>• <b>Walls, floors, and ceilings</b> – Must be constructed from cleanable, impervious, and non-absorbent materials to prevent contamination.</li><li>• <b>Air, gas, and steam systems</b> – Must be designed and maintained to eliminate any risk of contamination.</li><li>• <b>Water lines</b> – No cross-connections, adequate hot water and pressure for handwashing and cleaning, back-flow must be prevented at the source. Water lines must be labelled.</li><li>• <b>Ducting, conduit, and piping</b> – Designed to prevent contamination of food, ingredients and food contact surfaces. Pipes carrying wastewater or sanitary waste should not be located directly over product lines or storage areas. Chemical lines must be labelled.</li><li>• <b>Ventilation</b> – Must be adequate to remove dust and eliminate steam or condensation. Exterior vents must be screened or contain louvres.</li><li>• <b>Drainage</b> – Must provide adequate drainage to prevent pooling of water. Use removable drain covers for cleaning. Drain lines must be separated from sewage lines (no cross-connections). Your condenser/evaporator in your cooler/freezers must not drain directly to the floor.</li><li>• <b>Storage areas</b> – You will need a locked, ventilated area for chemical storage and cleaning supplies, and a separate maintenance area to store any maintenance tools/equipment.</li><li>• <b>Catwalks, stairs</b> – No open grates directly above exposed food product or food product surfaces, must be easily cleanable.</li><li>• <b>Sinks</b> – Hands-free handwashing sink must be present at the entrance to processing/packing areas. Sinks must be connected directly to drains. Sinks in washrooms/lunchrooms do not need to be hands-free. You may need a utility sink for cleaning of equipment/utensils, separate from the hand washing sink. Must be stainless steel and connected directly to drain.</li><li>• <b>Washrooms</b> – Must not enter directly into the production/processing/storage areas.</li><li>• <b>Lighting</b> – Bulbs and fixtures must be shatterproof and not pose a risk of contamination. Must be adequate in brightness (110 lux for storage areas, 220 lux for production areas and 540 lux for inspection/grading areas).</li><li>• <b>Incompatible activities</b> – Ensure physical means are used to separate incompatible activities to prevent cross-contamination and cross-contact i.e., ready-to-eat vs. raw products, shellfish vs. fish allergens. It could also include time separation between activities with adequate sanitizing.</li></ul>

What You Need	Considerations
Construction Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Epoxy, paint, lighting, wall boards and floor coatings, etc.</b> – Must be approved for use in a food establishment. The use of paint in processing areas is not recommended as it has the potential to flake and become a foreign material hazard.</li> <li>• <b>Floors, ceilings, walls, coving, junctions</b> – Must be constructed of cleanable, impervious, non-absorbent approved materials. No paint, wood, or exposed brick. Wall-to-wall and wall-to-ceiling joints must be sealed, and wall-floor joints are recommended to be covered, but must be sealed. Puck-board or Trusscore panels (untextured for cleanability) is an acceptable wall/ceiling covering. Floors shall be sloped to drains to prevent the pooling of water. Use light colored finish so an inspector can easily determine cleanliness. Any open girder ceilings will need to be included on the maintenance and sanitation schedule.</li> <li>• <b>Windows</b> – It is not recommended to have windows/skylights in your processing and storage areas. If necessary, they must be constructed from shatterproof material or coated with a shatter proof film and tightly sealed to protect against dust, vermin, and other pests.</li> <li>• <b>Equipment</b> – Needs to be designed to prevent contamination of the food and must be easily accessible for cleaning and maintenance. Material needs to be non-porous, smooth (free from cracks, flaking, rust, bad welds, etc.) and have gauges/PLC's/screens/e-stops that are not easily breakable. Wood, galvanized metal or lead and painted surfaces are not acceptable materials. Maintenance manuals and specifications shall be on file. Equipment for a ready-to-eat processing area cannot be shared with a raw processing area.</li> <li>• <b>Utensils</b> – Must not be wood or pose a risk of contamination to products. Shall be identified as per their use i.e., color coded or labelled for food contact surfaces, nonfood-contact surfaces (walls, floors), other uses such as for cleaning drains/washrooms. Utensils for a ready-to-eat processing area cannot be shared with a raw processing area. Wire brushes are not acceptable.</li> </ul>



## ADDITIONAL FOOD SAFETY DOCUMENTS YOU WILL REQUIRE

<b>Sanitation Program</b>	Step-by-step written procedures that include cleaning instructions, Sanitation Standard Operating Procedure (SSOPs), chemical list, concentrations, including verification, personnel responsible, training, frequencies, records to prevent unsanitary equipment or facility and keep food safe for consumption.
<b>Preventive Control Plan(PCP)/Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP Plan)</b>	<p>The Preventive Control Plan (PCP) identifies and assesses all potential risks to product safety, and outlines control measures for each. A Preventive Control Plan is a HACCP based system used to control identified hazards and mitigate risk. The PCP must include control measures for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Process Controls:</b> Incoming inputs, product formulations and specifications, processing steps.</li> <li>• <b>Product Control:</b> Packaging materials, product identification, and finished product specifications.</li> <li>• <b>Import Control:</b> Procedures to verify safety and compliance of imported ingredients/materials.</li> <li>• <b>Export Control:</b> Measures for meeting foreign market requirements.</li> <li>• <b>Biosecurity:</b> Practices to prevent the introduction of hazards from external sources.</li> <li>• <b>Pest Control:</b> Monitoring and control procedures to prevent pest contamination.</li> <li>• <b>Chemical Controls:</b> Safe use and storage of non-food agents (e.g., lubricants, cleaning chemicals).</li> <li>• <b>Hygiene:</b> Employee hygiene practices and monitoring.</li> <li>• <b>Equipment Maintenance:</b> Preventive maintenance schedules to ensure hygienic design and function.</li> <li>• <b>Calibration:</b> Procedures for ensuring accuracy of measuring devices and monitoring equipment.</li> <li>• <b>Facility and Premises:</b> Measures to maintain the physical structure in a sanitary condition.</li> <li>• <b>Waste Disposal:</b> Safe and hygienic removal of waste materials.</li> <li>• <b>Receiving, Transport, and Storage:</b> Procedures to ensure inputs and finished products are safely handled and stored under appropriate conditions.</li> </ul>
<b>Training Program</b>	Outline of food safety training for workers; records of who completed it to ensure staff know how to work safely to reduce risks.
<b>Water/Ice, Air, Gas and Steam Safety Records</b>	Test results will be required to show your water, ice, steam and air are safe.
<b>Traceability &amp; Recall Plan</b>	A method to track the receipt of raw materials through to finished product distribution, including primary packaging. This is required in case of non-compliant situations (i.e., contamination, allergen mislabeling, etc.). A written recall program and complaints procedure is required and must be investigated.
<b>Allergen Management Plan</b>	<p>Procedures for keeping allergens separate and label checks to protect people with food allergies.</p> <p>Include SOPs for allergen control, allergen risk assessments, cleaning validation for shared equipment, sample labels with allergen declarations, and training records.</p>
<b>Environmental Monitoring Plan</b>	Detects pathogens (e.g., <i>Listeria monocytogenes</i> ) early and prevents food contamination. Details your routine swabbing/testing plan in production areas.



## GETTING LICENSED

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Once your space and documents are ready, you can apply for a seafood processor licence. You will typically need to include your business plan, facility drawings and photos, food safety plan(s) (PCP/HACCP) and proof of training and water test results.

You can create a My CFIA account and understand how to fill out the information by watching the video provided: <https://inspection.canada.ca/en/food-safety-industry/video>

After you receive your license, you will need to:

- Appoint a trained and qualified food safety team leader
- Train new staff and keep records
- Keep your written preventive control plan up to date
- Fix any problems quickly if they happen and be ready for inspections
- Renew your licence as required and report changes in operations to authorities

## RESOURCES & SUPPORT

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### CFIA:

- [Canadian Food Inspection Agency \(CFIA\) – Food Licences Overview](#)
- [Canadian Food Inspection Agency \(CFIA\) – Food Business Activities Requiring a Licence](#)
- [Canadian Food Inspection Agency \(CFIA\) – Fish and Seafood Requirements](#)
- [Canadian Food Inspection Agency \(CFIA\) – Preventive Controls and Preventive Control Plan](#)

### Perennia:

- A Quality and Food Safety Guide for Seafood Processors - [Download the full guide \(PDF\)](#)
- Environmental Monitoring Program Guide - [Download PDF](#)
- Templates and Downloads: HACCP forms, sanitation checklists, training logs, and more: [Perennia Food Safety Resources](#)
- Quality and Food Safety Training Opportunities (virtual and in-person): [Training – Perennia](#)

For help and advice from Perennia's Quality and Food Safety Specialists: [foodsafety@perennia.ca](mailto:foodsafety@perennia.ca)

## NOTE:

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This guide provides an overview of seafood processing licensing requirements. For a comprehensive list of required documentation, please refer to the accompanying **Seafood Processor Licensing: Complete Documentation Checklist**.