

2020 / Texas Restaurant Association

COVID-19 Restaurant Temporary Closing Checklist

INTRODUCTION

As we all know, the COVID-19 issue is complex and rapidly evolving. For many in the hospitality industry, government officials are mandating closing facilities, or dramatically cutting back services that may be offered. A network of hospitality experts based in Houston has prepared a summarized list of considerations for a temporary restaurant close down. Please note that many of these issues addressed are subject to state law and require analysis on a state-by-state basis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- STAFF MANAGEMENT
- PRODUCT HANDLING
- MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS
- FACILITIES MANAGEMENT
- BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



Staff Management



COMMUNICATION

First and foremost, inform all employees of your intent to temporarily cease operations.

LAY-OFF / FURLOUGH

Properly lay off or furlough employees in accordance with Texas labor law. Please refer to the below guidelines from **Attorney David Jordan with Littler** (Djordan@littler.com). If you have further inquiries contact your labor lawyer.

- If you are going to lay off non-exempt workers, their final paycheck is due within six *calendar days*.
- Many employers are engaging in temporary furloughs (a lay off). If you do so, your employees **are likely entitled to unemployment**. The TWC has waived the 7-day waiting period.
- When you lay off employees, we recommend that you tell the employee you will do your best to start rehiring employees as soon as the business climate changes. We would recommend you **not make individual promises to rehire particular workers**. The market may change, or you may desire to ultimately go a different direction with workers.
- If you are cutting salaries of exempt workers, you must do so for **“months, not weeks.”** Doing it for shorter periods may violate the salary rule for the exemption. If we come out of this quickly, we would recommend you bonus employees instead of changing their salary.

- You cannot **dock** an exempt worker’s salary, unless it is for a full day absence. So absent a long term cut in their salary (which I discussed in the prior bullet point), you cannot maintain the overtime exemption if you cut their pay in other ways.
- You can cut hours of non-exempt workers, or hourly pay rates so long as you **do so prospectively and give notice**. In Texas, no period is required, just before the work is done.
- Congress has passed **paid leave** for employees related to your current workforce. If you have already laid off your employees, this may not apply to you, but the DOL may clarify this issue in the coming days. If you have laid off employees request this paid leave, you should contact me. You can learn more day to day at littler.com/coronavirus, or email me.
- Federal WARN requires written notice of layoffs that affect 50 or more full time employees at a single site of employment, if the layoff lasts more than 6 months. Usually you need 60 days of notice of a layoff, but the unforeseen business circumstances can reduce the 60-days to zero, if you still give written notice properly. This is only going to matter if the layoff affects 50 or more people for over six months. I have sample notices if someone needs one. We can send by text, or email, but it has to be in writing. Employees averaging less than 20 hours a week over the last 90 days, or that were hired less than 8 months before the layoff are not counted in the 50. If it goes longer than 6 months, and we did not give notice, there is 60 days wages due to each affected employee. I think most employers think we are not going to last that long. But keep in mind.

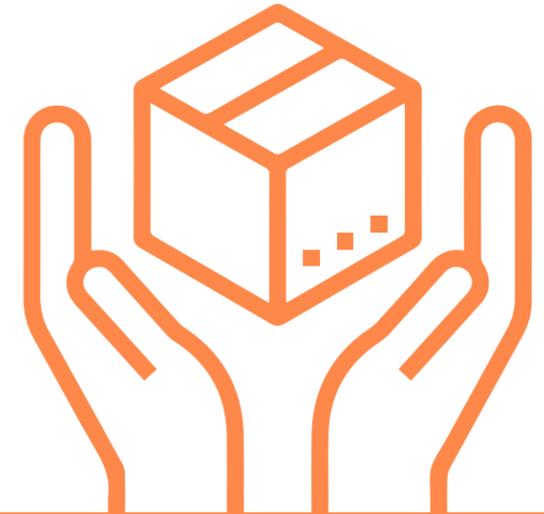
DOCUMENTATION/CONTACT

Ensure that you have accurately documented the last date of employment and last check date for all employees.

Make sure to update your contact list for all employees with current cell phone numbers.

SUGGESTION

Initiate a company group chat to update employees on the timeline as needed.



Product Handling

According to the USDA, “We are not aware of any reports at this time of human illnesses that suggest COVID-19 can be transmitted by food or food packaging. However, it is always important to follow **good hygiene practices** (i.e., wash hands and surfaces often, separate raw meat from other foods, cook to the right temperature, and refrigerate foods promptly) when handling or preparing foods.”

STEPS TO FOLLOW

- Empty, clean, and sanitize all refrigerators and parts of assembly lines.
- Transfer perishable foods to walk-in cooler/freezers.
- Clean and organize all shelf-stable food in the dry storage.

- Perform an inventory of all food items for accounting purposes.
- Implement a policy for all perishable food or shelf stable food with a shelf life lesser than two months – Ex. Distribute among your staff and/or donate to local Food Banks.
- Update your inventories based on that inventory loss and provide this information to your accountant.
- Draft re-opening orders for all of your vendors to implement as soon as the situation allows.
- Create preparation checklist to re-roll out full menus and return to daily operations.

Marketing & Communications

RESPONSE

- Develop a response plan: Internal & External
- Google my business profiles: Update hours of operation/mark as “Temporarily Closed”
- Update all listings as “Temporarily Closed”
- Update website
- Update voicemail and any recorded messaging

MARKETING/AD CAMPAIGNS

Contact your sales rep and ask for a temporary hold on your media buys & ad placement. Halt all campaigns/content so as not to offend based on current crisis.

*It is likely most ad content will be updated after crisis.

FACEBOOK & DIGITAL ADS

Temporarily cease all ad campaigns with exception of campaigns that support a local cause that has been pre-approved by management.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Create a post for your social media assets – stating you are *temporarily closed* due to COVID-19 and that you will re-open as soon as conditions allow. All future posts must have management approval. Provide social media managers *explicit guidelines* for posts and response. Develop a response plan for responding to customers and others.

MEDIA RELATIONS

- No employee will make comments to media.
- Should any staff be contacted by media, social media influencer or any others asking for comment – the request will be escalated ASAP to GM, owner or other identified company representative.

MEDIA CALLS

When the media calls:

- Ask for the name & media outlet.
- Ask best method to communicate – call, text, email.
- Ask “are you on deadline and what is your deadline.”
- Write down the questions.
- **DO NOT** respond or answer any questions – simply take request.
- **DO NOT** offer an opinion or remark on the issue.

QUESTIONS & SPECULATIONS

What to do when responding to customers:

- Respond with statement provided by management.
- **DO NOT** discuss, speculate or in any way talk about COVID-19 or effect on the industry.
- Tell your manager if you are asked about COVID-19 by a guest or media so that they can share the pre-approved responses.

MEDIA RESPONSE

VERSION 1

[Insert name of restaurant] is temporarily closed for business and is following strict guidelines specified by the CDC and local officials. We are all in this together and encouraging our employees and guests to observe the same preventative guidelines for staying well. We thank you for your continued business and support.

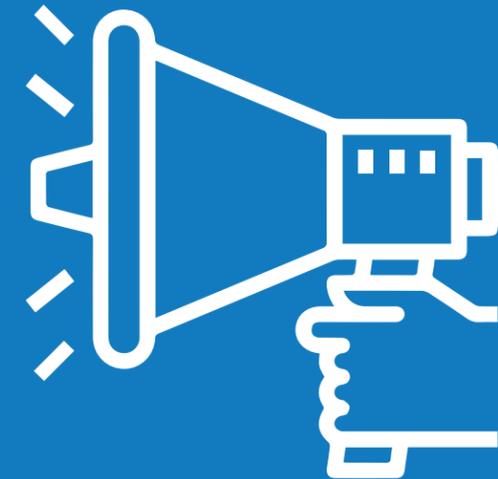
VERSION 2

[Insert name of restaurant] is temporarily closed and following strict public health guidelines specified by the CDC and local officials. We are all in this together and encouraging our employees and guests to observe the same preventative guidelines for staying well. We will continue to monitor recommendations and updates by the CDC and local officials, as we look forward to opening our business and returning to work. We thank you for your business and continued support in the future.

STATEMENT FOR GM/MANAGERS

VERSION 1

[Insert name of restaurant] is temporarily closed for business and is following strict public health guidelines specified by the CDC and local officials. We are all in this together and encouraging our employees and guests to observe the same preventative guidelines for staying well. We thank you for your continued business and support.



“ Additional statements should be developed based on situational needs and guidance by the CDC and local, state and national government. Management should monitor the situation on an ongoing basis and update statements as new information and developments warrant. ”

If you have further inquiries, please email **Melissa Stevens** at **Stevens Group** at melissa@stevensgrouppr.com

Facilities Management*

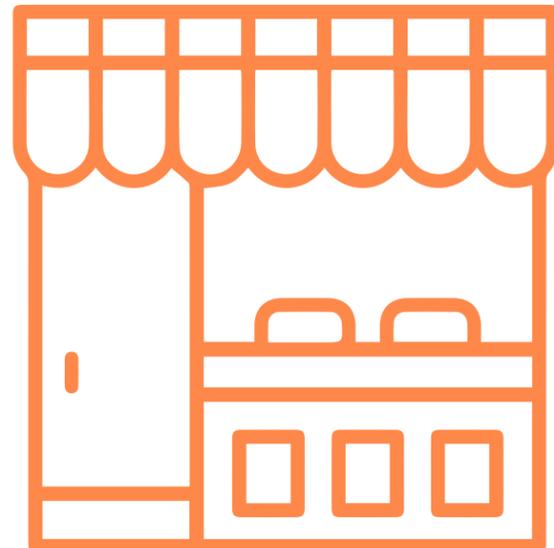
Business Administration

STEPS TO FOLLOW

- Deep clean all areas of the restaurant to avoid attracting unwanted insects or rodents. Devote extra attention to hot spots such as the kitchen, food storage areas, dish room, and bar.
- Remove final trash and secure trash area.
- We recommend leaving the air conditioning unit on (set at a higher temperature) in order to maintain air circulation to avoid unwanted odors upon return.
- Keep pilot lights on in order to be aware of any potential gas leaks during your bi-weekly facility checks.
- Do not shut off the water. Instead, visit the facility twice a week to run the faucets for approximately 5-10 minutes. Pour water down floor drains and floor sinks during bi-weekly visits to prevent sewer gas from entering the facility and causing a foul odor.

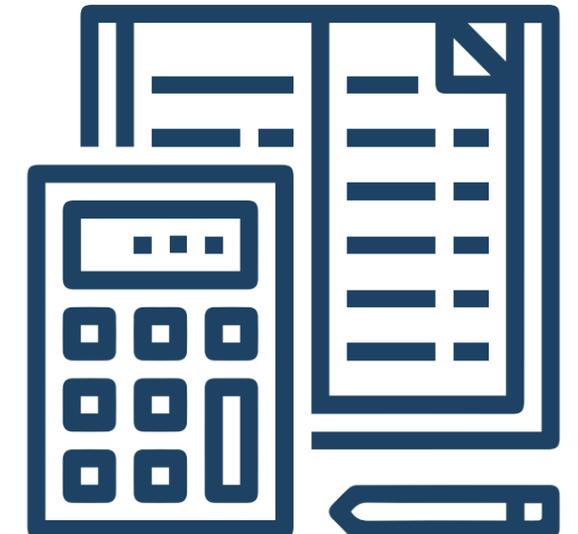
- Set rodent traps if desired for extra precaution.
- Ensure that all alarms are in working order (security, fire, etc.).
- Ensure that visible signage of the restaurant closure is on the building exterior.
- Activate alarms.
- Lock all access points (windows, gates, doors, etc.)

**Refer to the attached excel spreadsheet for a restaurant closing audit checklist.*



STEPS TO FOLLOW

- Request final/most up-to-date invoices from all vendors.
- Set restaurant phone line up to forward to a personal cell phone. This is an important point as TWC (Texas Workforce Commission) may call the restaurant to verify unemployment claims for staff members.
- Reach out to vendors/utility companies to negotiate a hold on services where applicable.
- Inform your landlord of the temporary closing and discuss rent abatement scenarios. Consult with your lease attorney if desired.
- Ensure that you have accurately documented the last date of employment and last check date for all employees. Decide if benefits will still be active throughout the temporary closing.
- Process final payroll and distribute.
- Ensure final inventory has been sent to your accounting. Notating any items and amounts that were donated.
- Do not forget to file your sales and mixed beverage tax reports.



2020 / Texas Restaurant Association

Stay up-to-date with news, government mandates, and relief efforts specific to the restaurant industry by downloading the TRA App and following the TRA on social media for live updates and real-time Q&A sessions.



www.txrestaurant.org
HQ Tel 512-457-4100
HQ Fax 512-472-2777



www.alacarteconsultinggroup.com
Tel 281-293-0077
ashley@alacarteconsultinggroup.com