



# Food Service Worker Safety

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Safety plays a key role in many different facets of the restaurant business. Three key areas of concern that should be covered during an employee orientation are food service, employee safety and restaurant and kitchen safety. Businesses should also:

- Offer a procedures manual or booklet that employees can use as a training manual or reference guide.
- Ensure that your restaurant has a policy in place to check on the employees to guarantee that procedures are being followed at all times.
- Establish a job-performance standard and a system for evaluation.

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## Restaurant Employee Safety

For food service employees, injuries generally fall into four main categories: slips and falls, lifting, cuts and burns. Here is how you can help protect your employees against each of these injuries.

### Slips and Falls

Slips and falls are the most common cause of employee injury in restaurants and a leading cause of death in the United States both on and off the job. More than 40% of dollars spent in the American food service industry is the result of slip-and-fall incidents. The cost of slip-and-fall-related claims is on average approximately \$3,500 per incident. With a typical restaurant experiencing three to four claims a year, this results in an annual cost of \$12,000 to the restaurant.

### Guidelines

- Instruct employees to observe floor and stair conditions for signs of needed repair. Rope off floors being repaired during business hours.
- Inspect floors often; schedule their cleaning during off-hours. Clean up spills as soon as possible.
- Ensure the stairs, steps and other changes in floor levels are visible, adequately lit and covered with slip-resistant cleaning compounds, waxes or soaps.
- Place handrails where needed on ramps and stairs; keep them in good condition.
- Keep work areas neat and uncluttered. Conduct regular housekeeping inspections of work areas.
- Clearly delineate traffic patterns in the kitchen with ample space between stoves, ovens and other equipment.
- Provide and maintain appropriate ladders (stockroom, shelf or step ladders) and step stools.
- Identify locations where spills can occur, where water and dirt are tracked in and where people constantly walk; place non-skid floor mats in these areas. Mats can also help relieve back and leg strain.



### Lifting

Lifting and carrying supplies are a regular part of a restaurant employee's job duties. During orientation, safety and one-on-one meetings, employees should be reminded about the injuries to the back, knee, arm, wrist, neck and shoulder that can result from improper lifting. Teach them proper posture, body mechanics, fitness and weight control, which can help prevent strain-sprain injuries.

### Guidelines

- Know the weight of the object you are attempting to lift. If an object is lighter than you expect, you may "jerk" your back or make other unexpected movements when lifting. If an object is heavier than expected, the same results may occur.
- Stabilize loads so they don't shift during handling.
- Make certain the carrying path is clear and free of obstacles. A slippery surface, pedestrian or vehicle traffic, poor illumination, narrow aisles or materials on the floor can cause you to make sudden and unexpected movements that could result in injury.
- Avoid prolonged carrying or holding.
- Get a good grip and solid footing.
- Keep the load close to the body.
- Don't twist your body while lifting or lowering.
- Avoid sudden or quick movements.

### Cuts

Cuts and lacerations can occur when handling knives or using mixers and other kitchen equipment. They can also come from handling broken glass. While these injuries are usually minor, the potential for serious injury cannot be overlooked. Instruct employees in the safe, proper care of knives and cutting tool.

### Guidelines for handling knives

- Keep all knives in their proper storage places when not in use. Do not leave them in the sink or in places where they are not clearly visible.
- Enforce the use of suitable knives for specific jobs.
- Keep knives and other cutting tools in good condition.
- Supply and encourage the use of cutting gloves.

### Guidelines for handling broken glass

- Wear safety glasses when necessary.
- Wear protective gloves. Never pick up glass with your bare hands.
- Always use a dustpan and broom.
- Never throw broken glass into a food-designated garbage can or put it down a drain. Provide a specific container for broken glass.



## Restaurant and Kitchen Safety

### Preventing Fires

Restaurants are a high-hazard class for fire losses with the great potential for total building losses. Even minor fires can result in a complete loss of inventory through condemnation by health authorities. Many restaurants never reopen after a major fire. If you are able to reopen, the profitability from your business may still suffer greatly. Reasons why your business may suffer include:

- Loss of customers who may never return
- Cost of hiring new employees to reopen your business
- The extra time and effort to reopen your business
- Payment of salaries of key employees while your business is closed
- Refinancing new equipment or building at an increased cost
- Loss of records
- Loss of money and accounts receivable

### Burns

Did you know that burns are the second-most frequent types of accidents in a restaurant? Food service employees are susceptible to burn hazards when working around fryers, ovens and other cooking equipment, so careful handling of equipment is required.

#### Guidelines

- Check and maintain cooking and heating equipment on a regular basis. Make necessary repairs immediately. Train employees in the proper use of cooking equipment.
- Insulate and protect hot water lines.
- Take care with deep fryers. Your establishment may need personal protective equipment (PPE) that resists grease and heat to at least 400 degrees. When draining and filtering oil from deep fryers, the best protection is a filtration suit, which provides full-body protection against spills. It should have a liquid vapor barrier.
- In general, cool oil to 100 degrees or lower. Drain the oil into containers made especially for this task. Do not use plastics because they can melt and leak. Mark the containers and place in an area away from traffic, sharp objects and heat sources while it cools.
- Some cleaning products contain ingredients that, if improperly handled, can cause chemical burns. Chemicals sometimes require different PPE and safety precautions. Follow the guidelines on the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS).

### Chemicals

When working with or handling chemicals, it's important that employees are aware of the product's standards according to the MSDS sheet. In addition, steps should be taken to:

- Have a no smoking policy and enforce it.
- Clean up spills immediately.
- Store chemicals in the manufacturers' original containers or in punctureresistant, tightly sealed containers.
- Always follow directions when handling containers. Never mix chemicals unless directions call for mixing.

### Fire-Detection Devices

Fire-detection and alarm devices are essential to employee and guest safety. These are also important when your establishment is left unattended, which is when more than half of all restaurant fires start. Know the types of fire-detection and control devices you have, how they work and how to maintain them.

### Paper and Dry Goods

Practice good housekeeping at your restaurant. Never store soiled rags, paper products, cardboard boxes and trash in work areas. Dispose of these materials ongoing throughout the day. And never store combustible items and materials around heat sources or chemicals.

### Electrical Fires

Electrical fires are one of the leading causes of restaurant fires. While they are often sparked by faulty electrical wiring or equipment, improper use of equipment can also be a cause.

- Check for equipment that sparks or smokes.
- Check for cracked or broken switch or receptacle plates.
- Do not use temporary wiring.
- Always use grounded plugs or outlets.
- Never use frayed cords or wiring.
- Never overload electrical outlets.
- Check wiring in outdoor and indoor signs.
- Keep equipment, sockets and wiring clean of dust or grease buildup.
- Have electrical systems and wiring checked by an electrician routinely.
- Only use UL-listed electrical appliances.

### Grease Fires

Equipment, such as ranges, fryers, broilers and convection ovens, can be susceptible to grease fires. To avoid this, make sure that the equipment is properly working and regularly clean grease from it as well as walls, work surfaces and heating, air conditioning and ventilation units located nearby. In addition:

- Deep fat fryers should have a separate high temperature control to cut off the fuel supply when the temperature exceeds 475 degrees.
- Maintain 16 inches of clearance between any open flames and deep fat fryers.

### Hoods, Vents and Filters

Hoods, vents and filters can be serious fire hazards, but they are frequently overlooked when it comes to cleaning. Take the following steps to help prevent fires in these areas:

- Light fixtures in the hood and the motor and switches for the duct exhaust fan must be vapor-proof.
- For hood and duct cleaning intervals with low to moderate grease generation, a monthly contract for cleaning is always best. The next best recommendation is every other month. However, a contract for cleaning every six months is average.
- For hood and duct cleaning intervals with heavy grease generation, a monthly contract is always best. The next best recommendation is every other month. However, a contract for cleaning every three months is average.
- We recommend cleaning filters at least once a day. However, with very low grease generation, it is common to clean them once a week.

### Automatic Suppression System (sprinklers)

An approved automatic fire-extinguishing system should protect 100% of the cooking surface and have a central station alarm connection. This would include grills, deep fat fryers, broilers and range tops. They should also protect the hood and duct system.

#### Guidelines

- Purchase portable fire extinguishers for the kitchen areas and check them at least once a year. Train all employees on their proper use.
- An inspection and servicing of the fire-extinguishing system and listed exhaust hoods containing a constant- or fire-actuated water system should be made at least every six months by properly trained and qualified persons.

## Crime/Security

Because restaurants have large amounts of cash on hand daily, theft is an inherent possibility. Success in reducing these crime-related losses begins with making crime awareness a part of your restaurant operation. Crime awareness should begin with employee orientation, and it should continue by means of follow-up training, posters and in-house publications such as fliers and company newsletters, if possible.

You also have a liability to your guests. Although state laws vary and continue to evolve as cases are heard, one trend is to hold owners, landlords and property managers to an increasing standard of responsibility for the personal safety of patrons, guests and the general public while they are on their premises.

#### Guidelines

- Include reference checks in your hiring process, as more than one-half of all thefts involve present or former employees.
- Include background checks.
- Encourage tenants and patrons to report all security concerns promptly. Document your action.
- Work with the local police department to organize a neighborhood watch program to give the employees and guests more security.
- Install bright lights in recreational areas, parking lots and garages and keep them in good working order. Add lights as needed to minimize dark spots.
- Arrange for a single, well-lit and easily observable point of entry into garages and parking lots, as well as interior courtyards whenever feasible.
- Keep a drop safe or burglar-resistant safe on-site for the safekeeping of money. Make deposits regularly, but not on a predictable schedule.
- Pull cash from registers often.
- Keep minimal amounts of cash on hand during business hours and only the money necessary for opening in the safe at night.

## Want to know more?

As your WorkSafe Consultants, we're committed to providing you unrivaled loss-control services and online safety materials, including:

Safety-training modules accessible 24/7 for policyholders' employees

- Loss control booklets and other printed materials available to print and order from our website
- Low-cost safety training videos from our online library

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