

FIRE PREVENTION 101: THE BASICS ON RESTAURANT FIRE SAFETY

Restaurants—with their open flames, hot equipment, electrical connections, cooking oils, cleaning chemicals and paper products—have all the ingredients for a fire to flame out of control. Nearly 8,000 eating and drinking establishments report a fire each year, according to 2006-2010 data tabulated by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). These fires caused an annual average of \$246 million in direct property damage.

A fire can devastate your business, leading to lost revenues and even permanent closure. But there are steps you can take to prevent fires and minimize the damage.

PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE

- **Maintain automatic fire-suppression systems in kitchens.** This is crucial because 57% of restaurant fires involve cooking equipment. These systems automatically dispense chemicals to suppress the flames and also have a manual switch. Activating the system automatically shuts down the fuel or electric supply to nearby cooking equipment. Kitchen hood fire-suppression systems shall be professionally inspected and tagged semi-annually. The manufacturer can refer you to an authorized distributor for inspection and maintenance.
- **Maintain portable fire extinguishers.** You'll need Class K extinguishers for kitchen fires involving grease, fats and oils that burn at high temperatures. Class K fire extinguishers are only intended to be used after the activation of a built-in hood suppression system. Keep Class ABC extinguishers elsewhere for all other fires (paper, wood, plastic, electrical, etc.). Portable Fire extinguishers shall be professionally inspected and tagged annually.
- **Schedule regular maintenance on electrical equipment,** and watch for hazards like frayed cords or wiring, cracked or broken switch plates and combustible items near power sources.
- **Have your exhaust system inspected for grease buildup.** The NFPA Fire Code requires quarterly inspections of systems in high-volume operations and semi-annual inspections in moderate-volume operations. Monthly inspections are required for exhaust systems serving solid-fuel cooking equipment, like wood- or charcoal-burning ovens. Clean grease buildup from grease filters and extinguishing nozzles at least every week. Cooking grease becomes more flammable as it gets dirtier.

STAFF TRAINING

Train your staff to:

- **Find and use a fire extinguisher appropriately.** An acronym you may find helpful is **PAST** – **P**ull out the pin, **A**im at the base, make a **S**weeping motion, (be) **T**en feet away.
- **Clean up the grease.** Cleaning exhaust hoods, ducts and fans is especially important, since grease buildup can restrict air flow. Be sure to also clean walls and work surfaces; ranges, fryers, broilers, grills and convection ovens; vents and filters. Maintain grease traps - Full grease traps have pieces of food and maybe even stray paper products inside them and can catch fire when more hot grease is added.
- **Never throw water on a grease fire.** Water tossed into grease will cause grease to splatter, spread and likely erupt into a larger fire.
- **Remove ashes** from wood- and charcoal-burning ovens at least once a day. Store outside in metal containers at least 10 feet from any buildings or combustible materials.

This information is provided by the Midlothian Fire Department to help you keep your eating establishment safe.

- **Make sure cigarettes are out** before dumping them in a trash receptacle. Never smoke in or near storage areas.
- **Store flammable liquids properly.** Keep them in their original containers or puncture-resistant, tightly sealed containers. Store containers in well-ventilated areas away from supplies, food, food-preparation areas or any source of flames.
- **Tidy up to avoid fire hazards.** Store paper products, linens, boxes and food at least 18” away from heat sources and cooking equipment. Properly dispose of soiled rags, trash, cardboard boxes and wooden pallets at least once a day.
- **Use chemical solutions properly.** Use chemicals in well-ventilated areas, and never mix chemicals unless directions call for mixing. Immediately clean up chemical spills.

BE PREPARED: HAVE AN EMERGENCY PLAN

If a fire breaks out in your restaurant, your staff must take control of the situation and lead customers to safety.

- **Be prepared to power down.** Train at least one worker per shift how to shut off gas and electrical power in case of emergency. Keep electrical panels and gas shut-off valves clear and accessible at all times.
- **Have an evacuation plan.** Designate one staff member per shift to be evacuation manager. That person should be in charge of calling 911, ensuring all exits are clear, determining when an evacuation is necessary and ensuring that everyone exits the restaurant safely. Ensure your staff know where the closest exits are, depending on their location in the restaurant. Remember the front door is an emergency exit.
- **Provide emergency training.** Teach new employees about evacuation procedures and the usage of fire-safety equipment. Give veteran staff members a refresher course at least annually.



Source: National Fire Protection Association, "Structure Fires in Eating and Drinking Establishments"

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