

Common Electrical Hazards in the Commercial Kitchen

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With all electrical implements, there is the threat of electrocution. Commercial kitchen employees face an increased risk because water spills and grease fires will only increase the dangers faced by electricity. Whatever the restaurant area, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has specific standards and suggestions to minimize the threat of electrocution.

Potential Hazards

All restaurant employees face the danger of electrocution, psychological shock or even death when working around electrical equipment in the commercial kitchen. The hazardous areas which pose the greatest threat are:

- Worn electrical cords on countertop cooking equipment.
- Wet cleaning practices.
- Faulty wiring or restaurant equipment.
- Damaged outlets or connectors.
- Improperly used or damaged extension cords.

What Employees Can Do to Protect Themselves

Restaurant employees rely on their supervisors to provide a safe working environment, but it is up to the worker to keep an eye out for electrical hazards and report them to the manager immediately. Also, when working with electrical equipment, there are several things commercial kitchen workers can do to prevent any accidents.

- Know how to shut off power in case of an emergency.
- Keep the power cord away from the equipment when in use.
- Pull on the plug itself, not the cord when unplugging equipment.
- Use ceiling or floor plugs rather than running cords across an aisle.
- Avoid touching the prongs of a plug while inserting it into an outlet.
- Do not touch a person that is being shocked. Wait until the power is turned off.
- Do not plug something in if the cord is wet or if you are touching a wet surface.
- If extension cords are warm when in use, they are being overloaded and can cause a fire or electrocution. Find a thicker extension cord.

What Employers Can Do to Protect Employees

Exposed Electrical Box

- Use ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). This type of outlet has a built-in circuit breaker and stops the flow of electricity before a dangerous amount passes through a person's body.
 - Ensure that exposed electrical boxes (those on the outside of the wall) are made of a non-conductive material, like plastic, so touching the box does not act as a ground and electrocute the person.
 - Properly label all circuit breakers or fuse boxes so corresponding fixtures and outlets are easy to identify. Switch off circuit breakers in case of an emergency.
 - Provide heavy-duty extension cords and power strips for employees to use so a single cord or circuit is not overloaded.
- OSHA Standards

Grounding an Electrical Current

All forms of electricity, whether a bolt of lightning or an outlet, seek the quickest route to the earth. Electrical circuits and pieces of equipment have a separate wire, called a ground, that provides that route should there be any faulty wiring. If wiring is faulty and the item is not properly grounded, the outside of the machine or electrical outlet could become energized. Any person that touches the energized item will act as the ground and suffer electrocution.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration has developed the following standards to protect employees from electrocution:¹

- **Standard 1910.22(b)(1)**. Establishments must provide floor or ceiling plugs so equipment power cords do not run across walkways.
- **Standard 1910.303(g)(1)**. There must be sufficient space to work around and service electrical equipment at all times.
- **Standard 1910.304(f)(5)(v)**. All electrical outlets near sources of water must be properly grounded.
- **Standard 1910.334(a)(2)(ii)**. Cords, receptacles and portable electronic equipment that are damaged must be removed from service and repaired before they can be used again.
- **Standard 1910.334(a)(5)(i)**. Managers must train employees not to plug or unplug equipment when their hands are wet.

¹ Occupational Safety and Health Administration, "Youth Worker Restaurant Safety," <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/youth/restaurant/index.html> (accessed November 4, 2008).

Information obtained from FSW (Food Service Warehouse) website
www.foodservicewarehouse.com