Restaurant Fire Hazards

Author: Jason Rahm

Fire is a hazard faced by all commercial kitchens. It only takes a single spark or small gas leak to set a restaurant afame. Only through properly training employees and following OSHA’s fire safety standards can a restaurant owner protect employees and customers from danger.

Potential Hazards

Electricity and gas are the forms of energy used to power a commercial kitchen. Everywhere that energy is found there is a potential fire hazard. The following list highlights the most common causes of restaurant fires:

- **Open flames.** Loose clothing and hair can easily catch fire if they come into contact with open flames.
- **Full 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.
- **Poor housekeeping.** Fire can quickly spread in dirty and cluttered walkways and storage areas.
- **Faulty or frayed electrical cords.** Frayed electrical cords or faulty equipment are more likely to spark and cause an electrical fire.
- **Improper storage of flammable materials.** Flammable materials must be stored away from open flames or heat sources so they do not combust.

What Employees Can Do to Protect Themselves

As the main operators of restaurant equipment, commercial kitchen employees must follow proper operating and maintenance tasks in order to prevent fires. Here are some tips kitchen workers can follow to minimize the risk of fire:

- **Understand the fire safety procedures for your workplace.** Know where fire extinguishers are located, how to manually activate the fire suppression system and the emergency exit route for your work area.
- **Do not store flammable items near open flames.** Aprons, loose clothing and aerosol cans are all examples of flammable material that can easily catch fire or explode if placed near an open flame or heat source.
- **Regularly clean grill surfaces.** Grease and food particles can accumulate on a grill’s surface and easily ignite if not removed.
- **Do not use defective equipment or frayed power cords.** These are a source of both fire and electrocution.
- **Avoid cooking areas unless assigned to work there.** An over-crowded cook line increases the risk that a stray article of clothing will come in contact with an open flame.
- **Never throw water on a grease fire.** That will only make it worse. Instead use a Class K fire extinguisher for large fires or baking soda for small skillet fires.
• **Stop, drop and roll.** If you do catch fire, rolling around on the floor is the quickest way to smother the flames.

What Employers Can Do to Protect Employees

Restaurant owners and managers must provide proper training in order to protect their employees and business from fire. Here are some ways employers can minimize the dangers of a fire in the commercial kitchen:

• **Train employees on fire extinguisher use.** Train employees on each shift how to properly use a fire extinguisher and activate the overhead fire suppression system, so in the event of a fire, someone on the cook like will know what to do.

• **Make sure employees do not attempt to fight the fire.** Employees must first sound the alarm, call the fire department and activate the overhead suppression system before attempting to battle the flames themselves.

• **Empty grease traps regularly.** Overfilled grease traps can catch fire.

• **Keep aisles uncluttered.** Cluttered walkways will hamper employees and customers trying to escape from a fire.

• **Provide sufficient lighting.** The emergency exit route needs to be adequately lit so employees and customers can see where they are going in case of an emergency.

• **Make sure exit signs are functioning.** This allows employees and guests to quickly identify the exit in an emergency.

OSHA Standards

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration has specific standards designed to minimize the risk of fire in commercial establishments. The restaurant owner can be severely fined if they are found to be non-compliant with the following fire-safety standards:

• **Standard 1910.39(c)(3).** All equipment that produces heat must be regularly maintained to prevent accidental combustion of flammable materials.

• **Standard 1910.157.** Employers must have an emergency action plan in place for operations, like restaurants, that require a fire extinguisher to be on hand. The action plan must also include a labeled exit route so guests and employees know the quickest path out of the establishment should it catch on fire.

• **Standard 1910.157(c)(2).** Class K fire extinguishers are the only type approved for use in commercial kitchens.

• **Standard 1910.157(g)(3).** Employers must provide training in the use of fire extinguisher to those employees designated to use fire fighting equipment.

• **Standard 1910.39(d).** Employers must inform employees that they are being exposed to a potential fire hazard when assigned to their jobs. The employer must also go over the necessary emergency procedures in case a fire occurs.

• **Standard 1910.160.** An overhead fire extinguishing system must be installed and maintained.

• **Standard 1910.161.** The overhead fire extinguishing system must dispense a dry chemical powder capable of combating a grease fire.
• **Standard 1910.303(b)(1).** Electrical equipment must be properly maintained and free from hazards that may cause death or harm employees.

• **Standard 1910.305.** Included in this standard are provisions for proper fire alarm wiring and the requirement that no wiring is installed in ducts that are used to transport dust, loose stock or flammable vapors.

• **Standard 1910.37(d).** Exit routes must be maintained during construction, repairs or renovations.

• **Standard 1910.37(d)(2).** Employees are not allowed in the workplace unless required exit routes and fire protection systems are maintained.

• **Standard 1910.37(d)(3).** Employees must not be exposed to above normal fire hazards during construction, repairs or renovations.

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