

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

A guide to risk management for restaurants



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Introduction

Running a restaurant is accepted as one of the most challenging professions. Success can be determined by anything from location and new competition to the uncertainties of changing tastes and 'food fashions'.

These are all business risks that are difficult to predict and plan for. However, there is a range of far more definite business risks that you can identify and plan to either avoid or mitigate – and undertaking this risk management process is increasingly accepted as intrinsic to sound business management.

Some of the key risks faced by restaurant businesses, and approaches to avoiding their worst potential impacts are outlined in this guide. It covers:

- Physical risks
- Health and safety
- Food safety

Section 1 - Physical risks

The physical risks – fire, flooding, theft – facing your business can have the most dramatic and disruptive effect, but they are often the easiest to guard against. Measures, for instance, to prevent or contain fire are well established, and many of them will be familiar to any experienced business manager.

Despite this, a significant majority of businesses affected by this kind of incident find themselves ill equipped to deal with its consequences – and a similarly large proportion never fully recover. Following the simple risk management steps outlined below will help you to ensure that your business does not become a member of this unfortunate majority.



Fire

Fire causes billions of pounds worth of damage to businesses large and small every year. The nature of the restaurant trade makes restaurant businesses particularly susceptible to fire hazards.

As you would expect, the majority of fire risks facing the restaurant trade are to be found in the kitchen. Primary risks include:

- Ignition of combustible deposits inside extraction ducts by flames, sparks or hot gases from cooking
- Spontaneous ignition of superheated oils
- Fan-motor failure or overheating caused by hardened grease when restarting seasonal catering establishments or non-24 hour operations
- Thermostats not working correctly and the absence of a second high-level safety thermostat
- Individual equipment not switched off, especially on cessation of business
- Metal extraction ducts are good conductors of heat and can ignite nearby building materials or litter
- Catalytic converters operate at 1000°C and are potential sources of ignition
- Solid fuel cooking equipment (such as barbecues)
- Tandoori ovens without igniters or pilot lights, lit by burning pieces of paper, or the absence of flame failure and safety shut off device
- Gas torches used to brown some dishes
- Cooking equipment left unattended during operation

Beyond these primary risks, a number of other factors could heighten the risk of a restaurant business being struck by fire:

- Lack of a competent person on site
- Faulty electrical appliances
- Design of extraction ventilation, such as length of ducts, length of horizontal ducts, type of fan, type and number of duct access doors
- Cleaning contracts may only cover hoods and easily accessible, visible areas e.g. those areas inside the ducting, which are within arm's reach
- Combustible food debris trapped in the grease filter

Key Fire Risks

Clearly, there are many ways in which a fire can start and take hold, so it is very difficult to ensure that any business is completely protected. It is possible, however, to significantly reduce the risk of fire - by ensuring that you take all the appropriate steps to protect your business in some key areas:

1. Arson

Sadly, over half of all fires affecting businesses are started deliberately, often following burglaries or vandalism and mainly at the hands of children and teenagers.

The following checklist highlights the good practice, vigilance, attention to detail and common sense that can go a long way to preventing arson from wrecking your business:

Management

- Never assume you are totally safe from arson and that it cannot happen to you
- Never hope for the best, because that's when the worst can happen
- Think of the worst-case scenario and plan your site security and safety accordingly
- Think about how and where intruders or arsonists could enter your premises. Take steps to prevent such entry

Fire protection

- Ensure extinguishers, hose-reels, alarms, detectors and sprinkler systems are maintained in full working order and protected against damage by vandals

Buildings

- Keep externally stored combustible stock or waste material well away from buildings and perimeter walls and fences
- Ensure doors and windows are in good repair and keep them locked when not in use
- Use British Standards approved locks and padlocks
- Avoid gaps under doors
- Fit metal containers on the inside of letterboxes

Employees

- Train staff to be security-conscious at all times and to be aware of the contribution they can make to preventing arson
- Encourage staff to challenge visitors and to report suspicious activities immediately
- Vet new employees carefully

End of the day

- Make it your responsibility to secure the premises at the end of each day
- Check that doors and windows are secure
- Check that no combustible material is left lying around
- Check that all personnel have left the premises
- Check that alarms and outside illuminations are switched on

Recycling

Business is becoming more aware of recycling. However, this in itself can result in problems with a build up of waste within premises rather than early disposal.

The following is good practice when managing waste materials:

- Provide suitable containers for the different types of materials that may be generated.
- Combustible materials (cardboard etc) should only be in waste containers manufactured from non-combustible materials.
- Keep combustible waste well away from ignition sources ie cooking appliances, electrical distribution boards, etc.
- Ensure staff know where and how waste materials should be stored.
- Ensure that waste containers inside buildings are regularly emptied.
- Provide suitable containers outside for items awaiting collection.
- Recycle materials where possible.
- Ensure that escape routes are not obstructed
- Ensure that fire brigade access routes are not blocked.

2. Electrical

Faulty electrical circuits and wiring are a cause of fires the world over. Make sure your electrical systems are not putting your business in jeopardy.

- Fixed electrical installation should be certified by NECTA (National Electrical Certification and Training Alliance Ltd) or by another NICEIC or ECA registered contractor. The inspecting engineer stipulates the period between each inspection should not exceed 5 years
- Ensure that every appliance has its own 13Amp wall socket outlet
- Multi-point electrical adaptors increase the likelihood of fire considerably – remove them from the premises
- Portable electrical appliances must be checked in accordance with the Electricity at Work Regulations [1989] by electricians who are members of the NICEIC or ECS (or additionally, SELECT in Scotland).

3. Kitchen extraction ducting

The principal fire risk in extraction ventilation is created by the build-up of cooking oil deposits. The cooking style will create different grease residues:

- Oriental cooking creates very sticky, syrup-like grease that can become very adhesive to metal surfaces. The surface tension cannot be broken by normal scraping or with general purpose cleaning chemicals
- Solid fuel cooked/charbroiled meats create large quantities of grease. A first layer of grease will bond to metal surfaces, and then additional layers of thick, heavy black carbon will build-up created by ash and grease from the cooking process
- Deep-frying creates grease similar to translucent creosote
- Frozen foods containing large quantities of water create a hard shiny layer of grease

The type of cooking oil or fat does not in itself pose any extra risk, although the following should be borne in mind:

- Safe cooking with oils and fats is usually at temperatures below 200°C. Flammable vapours are given off at 200/300°C and spontaneous ignition occurs at 310-360°C
- It is only a short transition from safe to dangerous conditions. The ignition temperature of most cooking oils is reduced by progressive oxidization through repeated use. Deposits of some mixtures, such as chicken fat and vegetable oil, are particularly easy to ignite

- Staff that are tired, overworked or undervalued can create risks. Long hours and late finishes could tempt staff to skimp on cleaning or to leave it until later, while a feeling of being undervalued can lead to indifference and poor performance

Within the extraction system, the following areas should be given particular attention:

Grease filters

Three types of grease filter may be used within the cooker hood:

- Mesh filters are low cost and contain a number of layers of material in a stainless steel or aluminium housing. Grease is deposited on the mesh and they are only suitable where low quantities of grease are produced. They have a limited life and need to be cleaned daily. Having no flame protection they should not be used where there is a high risk of fire
- Baffle filters comprise a number of interlocking vanes, which form a two-pass grease removal device and a barrier in the event of a flash fire. Grease laden air passes through the filter and by a series of forced changes in direction and speed, the grease becomes separated in the air stream and is deposited on the vertical vanes. Deposited grease is drained off into a collection drawer, which has to be regularly cleaned
- Water wash filters are the most efficient. They work by spraying the interior of the canopy extraction chamber with pressurised hot water automatically injected with a predetermined amount of detergent. Some have continuous cold water spraying to change the characteristics of the grease and encourage it to drop into a drainage system. They can reduce fire risk in solid fuel appliances where hot embers could be drawn up into the hood

Extraction ductwork

Difficult to reach ductwork should be given particular attention, particularly as it can pose a significant fire risk and is difficult to clean. Key considerations include:

- To minimise the risk of grease contamination, ductwork should take the shortest and most direct route to atmosphere with a minimum number of bends
- A schematic drawing of the installed ductwork and showing access panels, should be held by the kitchen operator to aid the cleaning process and to help the fire services in the event of a fire

- Kitchen extract ductwork must remain separate from other ventilation systems
- Where kitchen extract ducts have to pass through other parts of the building they should be contained within a separate outer duct having the same standard of fire resistance as the kitchen, or the parts of the building through which it passes, if this is higher
- Minimal ductwork should be installed outside the building because ductwork exposed to wind and rain will increase the rate of grease and fat condensing and solidifying inside the duct. Where this is unavoidable, ducts should be vertical and insulated
- Fire-resisting dampers must not be installed in kitchen extract ductwork. Grease deposits will prevent damper operation, and they will prevent proper cleaning
- Access doors should be as large as possible (to a maximum size of 460 x 610 mm in most circumstances) and made to the same acoustic, thermal and fire insulation properties as the ductwork. They should be fitted to the side of ductwork, not the base, to prevent grease leaking out

4. Freezers and chiller cabinets

Large walk in freezers and chiller cabinets regularly incorporate insulation materials, which are highly combustible and assist in the rapid spread of fire. The following steps should help to reduce the risks associated with these materials:

- It is essential that associated plant and machinery is kept clear of congestion and combustible materials
- It is recommended that formal maintenance contracts be in force for such equipment
- Technology now allows for the remote monitoring of fridge and freezer cabinets to alert a central monitoring station of a failure of plant. This can be inexpensive and be incorporated within an existing intruder alarm installation protecting the premises

Risk Reduction

Cutting the risk of fire must be a priority for any business. This is particularly true for restaurants given the range of risks and the fact that fire is most likely to strike in the area most important to continued operation of the business – the kitchen. Risk reduction takes two forms – prevention and impact minimisation:

1. Cleaning regimes

Catering equipment is usually cleaned before cooking begins or, preferably, at the end of the working day so that the equipment is left clean overnight. Staff may be tired at the end of their working day and tempted to take shortcuts, so close supervision will be necessary.

Cleaning checklist – Extraction Plant

The following checklist should form part of an operating and maintenance schedule that will keep your system in a safe condition. Competent kitchen staff may perform some of these tasks; otherwise a contractor should be employed.

In either case the following regime should be used:

Daily

- Check detergent container and fill if necessary
- Clean parts of hood visible from within the kitchen
- Check the grease drip tray, drain and clean as required

Weekly

- Remove and clean grease filters (more frequently under heavy operation, or for mesh filters)
- Soak filters in a detergent solution and rinse with a pressure washer or clean in a dishwasher. Note that baffle filters must be replaced with the baffles running vertically
- Check the grease tray for build-up and clean out using rags
- Check for other debris
- Remove access doors on the hood and inspect the interior with a torch. Visible deposits should be removed as far as possible (but note that this is not a substitute for regular cleaning of the entire system)

Monthly

- Where fitted, inspect fire suppression links for grease build-up
- Check all water nozzles for blockages

Quarterly

- Clean the extraction fan blades

Annually

- Call a ventilation engineer to test and inspect the hood and fan for proper operation and airflow
- Call a competent contractor to check the internal condition of ductwork and provide a report

Generally

- The frequency of local visual inspections (i.e. just behind grease filters) will depend on the cooking process and hours of operation, but should be at least weekly
- All metal surfaces should be checked for accumulated grease or dirt
- It is ineffective to create so-called “fire breaks” by cleaning small areas around access panels
- The inside of all filter housing and grease collection drawers should be cleaned regularly
- Baffle filters and grease collection drawers should be cleaned at least twice a week
- A competent cleaning contractor should clean extract ducts
- Consider relating cleaning frequency to a level of financial turnover
- Only suitable metal cleaning products should be used - Caustic or abrasive materials may damage metal surfaces and provide a breeding ground for bacteria
- Where removable filters are fitted, they should only be removed when the system has been shut down. This will prevent unfiltered air entering the ducts. Filters may be put in a dishwasher or hand washed to remove grease
- Cartridge filters have an air plenum as part of the design and grease collected in this area should be removed by regular cleaning (at least twice a week)

Frequency of Cleaning

The frequency with which the internal surfaces of the entire length of the extractor ductwork are cleaned should be based on a considered risk assessment.

The best way of doing this is to measure the quantity of grease deposited on the duct surface and establish the rate of fouling. Where this is impractical, then initial cleaning frequency should depend on the level of use, as indicated

below. Thereafter, before and after dirtiness and cleanliness measurements will permit the frequency to be adjusted to suit the actual observed hazard.

- Heavy use (12-16 hours per day) cleaning every three months suggested
- Moderate use (6-12 hours per day) cleaning every six months suggested
- Light use (2-6 hours per day) cleaning every 12 months suggested

Other factors

- Vulnerability to ignition
- Hygiene, vermin and mechanical hazards
- Seasonal catering establishments should have the system cleaned at the end of the season. It is particularly important to ensure fans do not become jammed against solid grease
- Regular cleaning will also reduce the likelihood of grease deposits baking and hardening on duct surfaces. In addition to cleaning ductwork on a daily basis you must remember to clean the hoods, filters and associated drains and traps, in accordance with manufacturers' recommendations

Record Keeping and Training

It is essential that records of system layout, risk assessments, inspection and cleaning reports are kept. Without these, it will be impossible to assess the necessary frequency and extent of cleaning, particularly if new equipment or processes are introduced.

You also have a legal responsibility to maintain staff training records. Should there be a fire or an accident, these records may provide the only defence against criminal prosecution.

Records may also help demonstrate to an insurance company that the standards required in its insurance policy have been complied with. Without them and depending on the circumstances of a loss, an insurance claim may be turned down.

2. Fire Suppression Systems

A properly designed and installed fire suppression system can help prevent the spread of fire into a duct and secondary fires from breaking out elsewhere.

If a good means of escape and other fire precautions are provided, the primary purpose of an automatic fire suppression system will be to reduce property

damage. Nevertheless, a risk assessment of specific circumstances might indicate that an automatic fire suppression system would also help to protect people in the kitchen, or in rooms through which ductwork passes. Key considerations include:

- Liquid type fire suppression systems and portable fire extinguishers are preferable since they give a greater level of cooling, seal the oil surface and prevent re-ignition
- Dry powder systems are unlikely to work with deep-fat fryers, but can be used for shallow frying/grilling
- Carbon dioxide systems are suitable in only a few special circumstances, and should not normally be fitted
- Special water mist systems are available. However, under no circumstances should any other water system be used
- A maintenance contract should be in accordance with manufacturer's instructions

3. Portable Fire Extinguishers

It is essential that portable fire extinguishers are suitable for the risk exposure within their immediate vicinity. For instance, specific extinguishers are designed to tackle fires involving deep fat frying. These designated Class F appliances should be provided in all kitchens undertaking deep fat frying and are available from all portable fire extinguisher contractors.

It is important that your employees are able to use fire equipment safely if required. Training should be provided – this can be arranged with the company which services the extinguishers or your local fire brigade, or fire safety department.

If you have already taken sensible and appropriate fire safety measures, little or no further action may be necessary.

4. Fire Alarms/Sprinklers

An automatic fire alarm system should be installed throughout the premises in accordance with BS: 5839: Part 1: 1988. This standard has recently been redrafted and all new installations should comply with BS5839: Part 1: 2002 and incorporate the following:

- Remote monitored fire alarm systems will provide detection of fire to a 24 hour alarm receiving centre to call keyholders and the Fire & Rescue Service.

- Installations and maintenance of systems should be carried out by contractors listed to LPS 1014 by the Loss Prevention Certification Board or British Approvals for Fire Equipment (BAFE) listed contractors on the Fire Detection & Alarm System Modular Scheme SP203.

You should also be conscious of the number of false alarms your system generates and take early action to rectify such problems. Policies being introduced by the Fire & Rescue Service could see a withdrawal of their response if you suffer repeated false alarms.

Installations should be also tested weekly with a written record of each test recorded and retained for inspection.

REGULATORY REFORM (FIRE SAFETY) ORDER 2005

From 1 October 2006, new fire legislation was introduced, called the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 for England and Wales. Similar changes have been made in Scotland via the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 and the Fire & Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. These Regulations apply to virtually all premises and importantly also applies if self employed personnel are on the premises. To comply with them you must:

- Assess fire risks in the workplace and reduce risks to the lowest level practical
- Check that a fire can be detected in a reasonable time and that people can be warned
- Check that people who may be in the building can get out safely
- Provide reasonable fire fighting equipment
- Check that those in the building know what to do if there is a fire
- Check and maintain your fire safety equipment via competent persons/contractors.

Fire Risk Assessment

The production of a fire risk assessment will allow you to assess the risks of fire and needs to be recorded if there are 5 or more employees. This should be conducted in a systematic and thorough manner and follows a logical pattern. There are five steps you need to take to ensure your fire risk assessment complies:

1. Identify potential fire hazards in the workplace

Consider potential ignition sources and how fire could spread. Think of your work processes, equipment and substances used/stored and how these can be minimised.

2. Decide who might be in danger

Always consider employees and visitors and make adequate provision for any disabled individuals or those with special needs.

3. Evaluate the risks and decide if existing fire precautions are adequate

Consider the likelihood of fire and the potential of that fire to cause harm to your employees and visitors. Take into account how the alarm is raised, any possible fire fighting measures and the means of escape.

Having produced a risk assessment, you should consider what measures might be available to address the risk in question - this could be to remove it altogether, change working practices or introduce controls so that the risk can be reduced and managed at a tolerable level.

4. Record findings and produce an action plan

Prepare a written emergency plan, appoint a person to implement the plan and ensure that this person is properly trained and provided with adequate fire fighting equipment.

5. Keep the assessment and action plan under review

Having completed the risk assessment and control process, it is essential that you keep it up to date through a system of regular reviews. The Regulations recommend a daily checklist as a minimum. You should pay attention to any changing circumstances that could impact on your risk assessment i.e. building alterations, new equipment or processes. Ongoing reviews should be carried out at least every six months.

5. Housekeeping

There are also a wide range of best practice measures that apply across the business, rather than to specific issues. This general housekeeping includes:

- Combustible waste must regularly be removed to metal waste bins with lockable lids
- Local authority issued plastic 'wheelie bins' are often set alight by vandals, which can result in substantial fire damage to building structure. Where possible, they should be located at least five metres from the external building wall – avoid storing under the eaves of single or two storey buildings as this can assist in the rapid spread of fire within the roof structure/void
- Cupboards containing electrical distribution boards, heating boilers and the like must not be used for storing combustible materials
- It is essential that escape routes are kept clear of obstruction at all times. It is not acceptable to store tables, chairs etc in fire exit corridors as this could restrict/block access, resulting in serious injury or loss of life

Physical security

Break-ins and theft also pose a significant threat to the success of restaurant businesses – for instance through damage to or theft of critical equipment. Of course, it is very difficult to stop a determined criminal. However, thieves rarely enter premises without weighing the risk to themselves against the potential reward. A few simple precautions can greatly reduce the chances of the premises being targeted:

- Dispense with any unnecessary doors, closing the aperture with similar materials to the remainder of the building
- Provide substantial, preferably solid or solid core doors to the remaining openings and secure by means of quality locks and padlocks to the relevant British Standard
- Padlocks should have a closed hardened steel shackle to resist bolt croppers and reduce the chances of being wrenched apart
- Use British Standard emergency exit devices for any designated fire exits
- Consider steel facing any vulnerable doors and fitting hinge bolts (a must for outward opening doors)
- Fit key operated window locks to any basement, ground floor or accessible windows such as those adjacent to flat roofs, external fire escapes or down pipes
- Consider fitting security grilles or bars to any secluded windows or those providing access directly to high-risk areas
- Doors to staff areas/offices/store rooms and the like should be fitted with digital locks to prevent unauthorised persons gaining access throughout the premises
- Ensure that perimeter walls and fences are maintained in good condition and that gates and barriers are well secured out of business hours
- Attractive stocks such as wines and spirits should be located within secure rooms or cupboards

Intruder Alarms

Given time and necessary expertise, determined criminals can breach most physical defences. The important thing then is to ensure that criminals entering your premises have very little time to damage or remove your property.

An intruder alarm backs up good physical security and should signal the presence of intruders in an area monitored by its detection devices:

- Consider the installation of an intruder alarm system if the premises are vulnerable or isolated, have suffered previous entries or attempted entries, or contain goods attractive to thieves
- Ensure that the system is installed by a UKAS (United Kingdom Accreditation Service) to EN 45011 or EN 45012 and that it is accredited and operates a Quality Management System in accordance with EN ISO 9000 and that an annual maintenance contract is entered into
- Provide a remote signalling transmission system to a 24 hour manned alarm-receiving centre to ensure police attendance in the event of the alarm being triggered
- Take special care to ensure that false alarms are not generated, as the police will not respond to alarm systems, which cause an unacceptable number of false calls

Police False Alarm Call Policy

Immediate Response

After 3 false alarms in a rolling 12-month period, this reduces to:

Keyholder response only i.e. Police will NOT attend.

Following withdrawal of police response, a period of 3 months free of false alarms must be recorded together with the intruder alarm being upgraded to provide confirmation alarm signals.

Your local crime prevention officer should be consulted to confirm variations applicable to your premises and/or area.

Key theft risks

Money

Clearly, money is the primary motivation behind the majority of break-ins, either through the removal of valuable equipment and stock, or through the theft of cash. Most thieves would prefer to steal cash, so this is the first area you should look at securing. Commonly used measures include:

- Plastic till-guards – offer a cheap but effective way to prevent till snatches
- Smoke and Dye money pack systems. Designed to emit coloured smoke and spoil stolen cash
- Pneumatic cash transfer system – an air-powered tube system to convey cash to a secure area or safe could be considered where large amounts of cash are being handled
- External access safes – where cash collection companies can supply or take away cash without the need to enter premises
- Counter Cache(s) – lockable metal containers, which can be kept close to the till, they are intended for the temporary holding of bank notes before transfer to the safe or bank
- Time-delay safes – secure and only possible to open after a pre-set time, these safes will keep any cash not in the till, or not yet banked, safe from all but the most determined robbers

Banking Procedures

- If large amounts of cash need to be banked or collected on a regular basis, then the safest method is to employ a recognised cash carrying company
- If you do undertake your own banking, be especially careful. Remember you are most vulnerable at the start or finish of your journey
- Choose the right staff for the job
- Be alert. Look out for suspicious people or vehicles
- Always use a secure container for carrying cash, but don't draw attention to it
- Don't be predictable. Vary the times and routes taken. Try and use the busiest roads and walk in the centre of the pavement, towards oncoming traffic
- Never use public transport
- If you use a car, try not to use the same one each time. If possible, use a decoy vehicle as well

- Make sure all vehicles are well maintained. Keep all doors locked and don't make unnecessary stops or leave the vehicle before you reach your destination
- If you are attacked - surrender the cash.

Water damage

Flooding, and the impact it can have on businesses, has been very much in the news in recent years. However, for restaurants, potential disruption through water damage is not limited to flooding. The perishable nature of stocks, along with the obvious focus on hygiene means that issues such as leaking roofs and blocked drains can also have a serious impact on the business. Measures to control risks from water damage are as follows:

Flood

If you have been flooded before or are in an area susceptible to flooding then it is advisable to do some basic pre-planning:

Prevention

- Is your business located in an area identified as being at risk from flood? To find out more about this contact the Environment Agency in England and Wales (EA) or The Scottish Environmental Protection Agency in Scotland (SEPA). Information is available from their websites: www.environment-agency.gov.uk or www.sepa.org.uk
- Both websites provide an overview of flood risk by postcode where you can check if you are at risk of flooding
- These agencies also have a 24 hour flood helpline - 0845 988 1188 to alert you to potential flooding risks
- In England and Wales you may be able to benefit from an Automated Voice Messaging service, which provides advanced flood warnings by telephone, fax, text message or pager. The early warning will allow you to consider positive actions such as moving contents away, raising them off the floor or moving to upper floors. You can register for this by calling the flood helpline 0845 988 1188

- In Northern Ireland Contact the Rivers Agency (www.riversagency.cyni.gov.uk)
- Have a plan of action on how you will react. This may form part of a business continuity plan - details of how to compile such a plan can be found at www.axa4business.co.uk. This will focus actions on the safety and well being of your employees and keeping the business running, focusing attention on the issues that will really matter after a major incident
- Ensure you know where to isolate electrical equipment and gas appliances
- Consider if essential items can be moved from the immediate area
- If you are in an identified flood area consider the use of temporary flood defences. Products should be tested and approved by the British Standards Institution under PAS1188. Further advice on British Standard Kitemark approved products can be found at www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Post Flood

If you do suffer flooding at your premises, you should take the following action:

- Avoid putting yourself or any employees at risk, personal safety is paramount.
- Ensure that you have consulted with your Environmental Health Department over what needs to happen in order to have your premises reinstated as a food preparation business. It is likely that your premises will have to be inspected and bacterial swabs taken to ensure the premises have been cleaned thoroughly. Remember flood water is contaminated with raw sewage and there are likely to be a number of bacterial agents present.
- Make sure that everyone involved in the cleaning up operation is dressed in appropriate clothing and wearing good quality rubber boots and protective gloves etc.
- Dispose of spoiled foodstuffs in a sealed skip.
- Encourage employees to take care. Slips and trips are likely on wet surfaces and the risk of falling or causing injury is greatly increased.
- Ensure everyone involved in cleaning follows good hygiene practices and is aware of the risks from flood water.

Other water damage issues are as follows:

Roofs

Competent building contractors should inspect building roofs annually, with remedial repairs completed promptly thereafter.

Where possible, flat roof structures should be avoided – this type of structure increases susceptibility to water penetration and reduces the overall security of the premises.

Gutters

Roof edge guttering and valley gutters should be inspected and cleared of blockage at six monthly intervals. The frequency may require to be increased where premises are surrounded by trees and vegetation.

Drains

It is essential that drains are maintained free from obstruction and are free flowing. Where blockages are encountered, professional drain cleaning contractors must be instructed to inspect and clear blockages immediately.

Restaurant kitchens are particularly susceptible to blocked drains from poor disposal of grease and fats – it is recommended that regular inspection and a specialist contractor undertakes cleaning of drains.

Stock and Foodstuffs

Stock should be maintained on display stands or racking a minimum of 150mm off the floor to reduce the likelihood of water damage to products.

Business interruption

It's a sad fact that 80% of businesses affected by a serious incident, such as fire or flooding, either never recover or close within 18 months. This is largely because they fail to recognise the potential long-term effects of even relatively minor incidents – based on their impact on reputation, cash flow and customer satisfaction.

There are two main areas where attention should be given to assessing the long-term effects of serious incidents and planning to overcome them:

Computer Data

- Computer data for stock control and accountancy records should be backed up and removed from premises at intervals not exceeding seven days
- Where back up records require to be retained within the premises, they must be within an approved Data Safe which is tested and approved to VDMA test standard S120 DIS
- Back up procedures should be tested at intervals not exceeding 6 months

Continuity Planning (Disaster Planning)

It is recommended that a business continuity plan (disaster plan) be established for the business. Completion of such can ensure that interruption to trading can be minimised and reduce the financial loss to the business. Details of how to create a business continuity plan can be found at www.axa4business.co.uk

Section 2 - Health and safety

Accident and injury rates in the restaurant industry have been getting steadily worse over the last six years. The current rate of major injury is now 54% higher than in previous years. Over 69% of major injuries result from slipping and tripping or falling on the same level or from contact with harmful or hot substances. The rate of minor accidents leading to three or more days off work has more than doubled over the last six years.

Accidents can result in uninsured costs representing up to 8.5% of a company's turnover and yet 70% of these accidents could have been prevented through improved health and safety management. In addition to this, the increase in cost of Employers and Public Liability claims arising from civil litigation can make your business an unattractive risk if you fail to manage health and safety adequately.

The main risks of injury to waiting staff are:

- Slips and trips
- Cuts
- Burns
- Injuries from lifting heavy or awkward loads

Noise at work regulations

Recent revisions to the Noise at Work Regulations may have an impact on employees within Restaurants especially where amplified music is played.

Employees working within environments where noise levels average 80dba (decibels) or more over their working shift could suffer long term hearing damage and allow civil litigation claims against you.

Areas where noise levels are higher, including kitchens, should be risk assessed and potentially a noise assessment be conducted by competent noise specialist.

Passive smoking related diseases

The smoking ban has now been fully introduced into the whole of the UK. Failure to comply can result in a fine of up to £2,500.

The ban applies to virtually all public places and workplaces. This includes restaurants and applies equally for employees and customers within areas of the restaurant that are enclosed or substantially enclosed.

All smoke free public places, workplaces and vehicles must now display no-smoking signs that meet the requirements of the Smoke Free (Signs) Regulations.

If smoking is allowed outdoors, you should ensure there are sufficient receptacles provided, such as sand weighted bins that are used exclusively for smoking materials and that are cleared on a daily basis.

Health and safety for waiting staff

The majority of injuries in a restaurant or dining area can be avoided by following a few simple procedures.

If you employ agency staff you must provide the agency with information on risks to their employees and the precautions applying to them, all such information should be recorded and retained in the event of a potential claim arising.

Employers must:

- Ensure the health and safety of your employees and those such as contractors and customers who could be affected by your activities
- Carry out a risk assessment to identify any risks and prepare written procedures to control and monitor risks
- Always discuss health and safety with your employees or their appointed representative and ensure any information given is recorded by means of employees' signing on receipt
- Always provide adequate facilities for staff including, uniforms and personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Provide adequate first-aid facilities and trained staff
- Ensure induction and relevant training and information on risks is disseminated to all your staff including any agency or temporary workers, make sure this is recorded
- Ensure that there are adequate and experienced staff to supervise operations at all times, and in particular those that have an added dimension of risk
- Set up emergency procedures and ensure that these work and are recorded. (e.g. for fire or accident)

The following checklists and should help you to protect the safety of your staff:

1. Temporary or Agency Staff

- Make sure that both temporary and permanent waiting staff are fully briefed on workplace health and safety risks and the controls to prevent injury
- Always remember that such staff may be unfamiliar with the workplace
- Remember that temporary staff may also have had little or no training in health and safety

Waiting staff checklist

Developing a list of simple measures that can be used by managers as a checklist to brief staff, or by staff themselves as a reminder of current good practice.

2. Site Layout

Draw attention to specific hazards in the premises such as:

- Low ceilings and door lintels, uneven flooring or ground conditions
- Ramps and slopes (help may be needed if pushing heavy trolleys on these)
- Disabled access routes, lifts and ramps

3. Cleaning Restaurant Equipment

Silverware

- Always wear gloves when using any silver dip or other cleaning agents
- Always follow the manufacturer's or supplier's instructions, make sure new staff have been briefed before putting them to work

Knives

- Kitchen and cutlery knives are a risk when left in water-filled sinks and other containers
- Wipe knives on the blunt side, with the blade facing away from you
- When carrying by hand, always point knife blade downwards
- Knives should always be stored in racks, point down

Glassware

- When polishing glasses, handle rims with care
- Handle chilled glasses with care; glass is more fragile when cold
- Always ensure that you have a glass policy and that staff are trained in the correct means of lifting and clearing breakages

4. Safe Use of Restaurant Equipment

Crockery and service dishes

- Do not stack too high; the weight can easily overload shelving and the pile of crockery may fall over
- Do not overstock service stations - the weight can overload shelves and drawers
- Open cutlery drawers slowly (particularly if full)

Laying up

- Always check that tables are secure and have been put up safely before any equipment or food is placed upon them, watch out for nip points in joints and hinges

Cutlery

- Use containers/cutlery baskets to carry cutlery
- Store cutlery in baskets handle uppermost
- Take care to handle knives by the handle only

Glassware

- When laying up for large numbers, use purpose-designed baskets or trays to carry glasses
- Pick glasses up by the foot or stem
- Do not bang the glassware together as this weakens the glass internally
- Carefully inspect glasses for chips or cracks when setting out
- Discard damaged glasses carefully and thoughtfully

Carrying trays and lifting loads

- Distribute crockery and cutlery evenly on trays
- Carry only a weight that feels safe and comfortable
- Ask the supervisor for help in moving heavy or awkward loads
- Know where the load is to go to before moving it
- Ensure route is clear before setting off

Coffee machines

- Only operate these when fully trained
- Follow manufacturer's instructions to fill and operate both small and high volume coffee machines
- Ensure coffee machines are positioned well away from children and in particular children on high chairs

Flammable and potentially explosive materials (e.g. methylated spirits, gas cylinders, aerosols, indoor fireworks, matches)

- Only handle when fully trained
- Store stocks away from heat and direct sunlight
- Follow manufacturer's or supplier's instructions when filling equipment with spirits or replacing gas cylinders, including what to do if they start leaking
- Use matches and tapers when lighting candles and heaters
- Position candles and burners well away from table decorations, curtains, fabrics and bar spirits

5. Staff Dress

Footwear

- Wear stable, properly fitting footwear to reduce the risk of slips, trips and falls
- Footwear that covers the foot will delay heat penetration onto feet from spilt hot liquids
- Make sure that footwear has a good grip and does not have smooth soles

Clothing

- Do not wear long, trailing skirts as they increase the risk of trips
- Do not wear loose, long sleeves as they can catch on door handles and the backs of customers' chairs or catch fire from candles

Hair

Tie long hair back or pin it up at all times to prevent it:

- Coming into contact with naked flames (e.g. flambé work, candles and indoor fireworks)
- Becoming caught on items of jewellery when serving guests or caught on backs of chairs
- Becoming caught when passing through plastic door curtains

6. Food and Drink Service

Swing doors

- Ensure you are aware of entry and exit routes if double swing doors are in operation or, if there are no swing doors, be aware that there may be different entry or exit routes to the service/kitchen area
- Go through swing doors sideways or backwards so that the body (and not the tray) pushes
- If there is a single exit/entry swing door, if possible check that no one else is coming the other way; otherwise approach with caution

Carrying trays or platters

- Ensure that the load is secure and comfortable to carry
- Distribute items evenly on the tray
- Place hot foods and liquids in the centre of trays to ensure spillages will fall onto the tray and not over you, other staff, customers, or on the floor

Carrying liquids

- Do not overfill containers i.e. soup tureens, pots of coffee or tea

Carrying hot dishes or plates

- Use a dry, thick, clean cloth (wet cloths transfer heat quicker and increase risk of burns)
- Warn customers and especially children if plates, soup bowls or pre-filled mugs and cups are hot
- Pay particular attention if carrying hot dishes or plates up stairs

Sparkling wine

- After removing foil, keep pressure on cork with cloth-end or thumb, while removing wire clip
- Then cover with cloth and ease out slowly (to control release of pressure from the bottle) by turning the bottle not the cork

Dumb waiters

- Only use after instruction by supervisor/manager
- Keep a list of persons authorised in writing to use the dumb waiter
- Never override the safety interlocks

Customers

- Be aware that customers (particularly children) may move suddenly or move their chair back just as their meal is being served
- If space is tight when serving, ask the customer politely if they can move to one side
- If silver-serving, make sure hot surfaces do not touch customers
- Watch out for handbags, briefcases and coats lying on the floor
- Train staff in what action to take if dealing with any customer who is drunk or aggressive

Spillages

- Clean immediately if there is a risk of slipping during service, or close the area off until it is cleaned
- Do not leave spillages or wet floors unattended, make sure someone is available to keep guests/staff away until the floor is cleaned and dried

Clearing away from the table

- Never use a broken tray
- Ensure the tray is stable and held securely before loading heavy items and always place these at the centre of the tray
- Do not overload trays; ensure weight of items is evenly spread across the tray
- Use trays, which allow the arms/hands to be held more or less in line with the shoulders
- Hold the tray with both hands, especially if it is heavy or fully loaded
- Only carry a weight that feels safe and comfortable, four covers alone of main course dirty crockery, cutlery and tray can weigh 7 kg
- Stack plates of the same size together
- Never stack cups more than two-high
- Place similar cutlery together on the tray to avoid risk of cuts when sorting prior to washing
- Use a separate tray to clear glasses
- When clearing without a tray, stack crockery on arm in balanced layers, positioning cutlery securely
- Do not load up more than can be carried securely or comfortably
- When removing rubbish, check that cigarettes and cigars are out and disposed of in a separate metal bin with no combustible materials
- Dispose of any broken glass or crockery in a separate designated container, taking care while handling

End of service

- Flambé lamps must be turned off when not in use
- Make sure that candles are snuffed out
- Check area for discarded cigarettes
- Switch off electrical equipment
- Do not stack chairs and tables above chest height
- Do not stack furniture on fire escape routes, in corridors or behind doors

7. Emergencies and Common Accidents

Emergencies

- Ensure that staff know what to do in the event of an accident, fire or other emergency
- Ensure that they are aware of the fire procedure and exit routes

Baby Seats and High Chairs

Baby seats and toddler chairs are a frequent cause of injury. Many of them are unsuitable and are rarely maintained with straps missing, clips and buckles broken etc, they are also rarely cleaned if at all.

- Make sure chairs are inspected regularly and keep a record of the inspections in a suitable register
- Make sure the chairs are cleaned with a good antibacterial disinfectant and that spillages and food residues are cleaned promptly

8. Further Reading

Slips and trips: Summary guidance for the catering industry Catering Information Sheet CAIS6 HSE Books 1996

An index of health and safety guidance in the catering industry Catering Information Sheet CAIS7(rev1) HSE Books 2000

08/01 CAIS20 C200 - Printed and published by the Health and Safety Executive. This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

Employment of young persons in restaurants

Young people are more susceptible to injury, mainly due to their lack of experience of hazards in the workplace. To safeguard young people and protect your business from civil litigation claims, you must assess and reduce risks, for all employees (whatever their age), tell them what the risks are and outline what steps are being taken to control them.

Additional laws apply to young people below the age of 18. You must: assess risks to young people before they start work:

- Take into account their inexperience, lack of awareness of risks and immaturity
- Provide information to parents or guardians of school-age children about risks and control issues before they start work; and decide whether to prohibit young people altogether from certain work activities
- You do not need to repeat this every time a young person starts work but you should always review the risk assessment if there are any changes to their workplace or duties

Other factors to consider are:

- Lack of physical strength
- Possible smaller size
- Any health issues (for example asthma) and any physical or learning disabilities
- You also need to consider suitable induction training, which must be recorded
- Supervision by a competent person and clear instructions on tasks you have decided young people must not do

NOTE: The regulations do not apply to young people working on occasional and short-term work that is not harmful in firms owned by their family.

Employment of children

Additional legal requirements apply when employing children:

- You must therefore always check with your local authority and insurance company before employing children below minimum school leaving age
- A child is someone below the minimum school leaving age (around 16, depending on their birthday and its relation to the date school term ends)
- Children below the minimum school leaving age must not be employed in industrial undertakings, such as factories or construction sites, except when on work experience programmes approved by local education authorities

- The minimum age for other employment is 14 years, but local authorities have the power to make bye-laws restricting work in certain types of premises to those above the minimum school leaving age. These bye-laws may also contain a list of light work which children aged between 13 years and the minimum school leaving age can do.

Slips, trips and falls

The fact that so many workplace injuries in restaurants are caused by slips, trips and falls should be cause for concern. These incidents not only deprive the business of critical staff members and disrupt the normal operation of the businesses, but leave it open to expensive compensation claims.

The checklists below should help to reduce such incidents, enabling you to minimise the impact of slips, trips and falls on the business, whilst protecting the welfare of staff:

1. Prevent contamination in the first place

For example, maintain equipment to prevent leakage from fridges, freezers etc and from over temperature ovens and fryers

2. Prevent contamination of walking surfaces

- Keep lids on portable vessels
- Have spill lips around preparation tables
- Use of dry methods for cleaning floors
- Clean incoming footwear
- Use lids on pots, don't let them boil too long
- Provide and use effective extraction ventilation for cooking fumes and steam with grease filtration
- Dry contamination, e.g. polythene bags left on floors
- Product spillages
- Cardboard laid over spills
- Make sure staff are trained and that the rule is to clean up as you go! Record all training and instruction.

Legal requirements

Recent regulations have re-emphasised the importance of measures to prevent slip and trip incidents.

- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations specify the steps required for effective risk control arrangements and employee duties, as well as training and consultation with safety representatives
- The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations require the construction of the floor surface to be suitable by not being 'slippery so as to expose any person to a risk to their safety' and the floor to have 'effective drainage'
- There are also duties on suppliers of equipment, floor surfaces, floor treatment substances and slip-resistant shoes to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the inherent safety of their products and to provide information to users

Lifting and manual handling

Manual handling causes almost a fifth of total reportable accidents in the restaurant industry. However, injury statistics are likely to underestimate the real situation. One reason is that only injuries immediately arising from an obvious incident will be reportable, whereas many injuries arise over a long period of time. This guidance explains the factors that can increase the risk of injury and suggests practical measures you can take to reduce this.

People who suffer injury are usually involved in:

- Lifting, pushing or pulling tables and chairs
- Setting up equipment and tables
- Moving stock to and from storage
- Filling and carrying bulk food containers and pots

- Handling casks and kegs
- Waste disposal
- Food service

Outside caterers have a greater range of tasks, involving carrying items over long distances. Often the weight of the load is quite low but this is only one of the factors that affects the degree of risk. Most injuries are strains or sprains to the back. However a significant proportion involves arm strains or sprains caused by repetitive type operations.

Your responsibilities as an employer, as well as the steps you can take to protect your staff are detailed below:

1. The Law

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations require you to assess which risks are significant. This will usually include manual handling. The Manual Handling Operations Regulations (as amended) require you to avoid the need for any manual handling operations at work which involve a risk to health and safety where practicable. If it is not reasonably practicable to avoid any manual handling operations, you must carry out a manual handling risk assessment to identify how the risk is caused, so each factor can be addressed and measures taken to control the risk.

2. Risk Assessment

Your assessment should cover these four areas:

- Tasks
- Loads
- Working environment
- Individual ability

3. Risk Factors

The following factors increase the risk of injury – you should consider whether any arise in manual handling work in your business.

4. Tasks

Do they involve:

- Awkward body movements, e.g. twisting, stretching, stooping, reaching?
- Holding or manipulating loads at a distance from the trunk of the body?
- Excessive lifting, lowering, carrying distances of loads?
- Risk of sudden movement of loads?
- Physically demanding work, especially where breaks are insufficient?
- Rate of work imposed by a process?

5. Loads

Are they:

- Heavy, bulky or unwieldy?
- Difficult to grasp?
- Unstable, sharp or hot?

6. Working Environment

Are there:

- Variations in floor levels or work surfaces?
- Extremes of temperature or humidity?
- Variations in individual capability?

7. Does the Job:

- Require unusual strength or height?
- Create a risk for those who are pregnant or have an existing health problem?
- Need special information or training to do it safely?

8. Other Factors

The more factors identified, the higher the risk will be. If more than one factor is identified in a particular task, the risk of injury may be significant. After completing the assessment you should take steps to control or eliminate any risks.

9. Practical Controls

Almost all manual handling injuries are preventable, usually with a minimum of cost. In many cases action is often simply a case of changing the way a job is done, such as re-siting equipment or adapting working heights.

The action required will depend on your findings in the risk assessment but your first priority should be assessing whether you can avoid manual handling tasks.

Examples of avoiding handling includes reorganising the layout of the kitchen/workroom to:

- Reduce the amount of lifting or carrying
- Using automated dosing equipment to reduce drum handling
- Use mechanical aids to make the task easier

Such aids include:

- Two-wheeled sack trucks
- Four-wheeled trolleys (with lockable castors if needed)
- Hoists
- Litter-picking arms
- False bottoms for deep sinks

Can you redesign individual tasks?

You should try to:

- Reduce the amount of twisting, bending, stooping, stretching, pushing and pulling
- Reduce the number of times it is necessary to do the task (but without increasing the load each time)
- Store heavy items on shelves at waist height
- Use trolleys to move loads around
- Use team working for tasks such as moving furniture

Can you make loads easier to handle?

For example:

- Buying cooking oil in easier to handle cardboard boxes with sturdy handles/grips
- Breaking down trays of A10 size cans before loading onto storage shelving
- Using concentrates of cleaning chemicals where appropriate
- Putting heavy equipment such as chest freezers on castors (lockable) to make cleaning routines easier
- Using lighter loads, e.g. 25 kg rather than 50 kg sacks

What can you do to improve the workplace conditions?

For example:

- Replace or repair uneven or slippery floors
- Provide trolley ramps at changes in floor level
- Ensure shelving is not overloaded
- Install automatic doors if staff have to frequently carry things through them

10. Information, Instruction and Training

It is difficult to get rid of all manual handling tasks. If there is still a risk, remember that providing information and training - for example, training employees in safe lifting techniques - are legal requirements.

A range of leaflets, training packs videos etc (some free of charge) is available from many sources to help you improve your employees' awareness of the risks and the precautions they should take.

11. Further Reading

Manual handling. Manual Handling Operations L23 HSE Books 1998
ISBN 0 7176 2415 3

Manual handling: Solutions you can handle HSG115 HSE books 1994
ISBN 0 7176 0693 7

Work-related upper limb disorders: A guide to prevention HSG60 HSE Books
1994 ISBN 0 7176 0475 6

Contact with hot substances

Accidents during the emptying and cleaning of fryers are a major cause of the burns suffered by employees in the catering industry. Here is some guidance on how to empty and clean fryers safely.

1. Hazards

Hazards connected with emptying and cleaning fryers include:

- Fire
- Burns from hot oil
- Contact with hot surfaces
- Fumes from boiling cleaning chemicals
- Danger of the chemicals overflowing
- Eye injuries from splashes
- Slips from fat spillage
- Strains and sprains while lifting and moving containers of oil

2. When to Empty and Clean

Most restaurant/catering establishments are closed overnight for at least eight hours. For fire safety and economy, fat fryers must be switched off when unattended. It is therefore common sense that cleaning and oil filtering should always be planned as a first task of the day rather than part of the closing down procedure.

If a 24 hour service is offered and the appliance is required continuously, there are two safe options:

- Use more than one fryer and clean them in rotation
- Use a fat saver or similarly designed appliance that removes the hot oil direct from the fryer, filters the oil and holds it safely. Under no other circumstances should personnel remove oil that is hot

3. Draining Oil Safely

Following the procedure outlined below should ensure that staff cleaning fryer appliances can do so safely:

1. Switch off appliance
2. Allow oil to cool, ideally for at least six hours and before draining the oil, check the temperature using a suitable probe thermometer. Do not drain if this is above 40°C
3. If the oil is too cold to drain easily, reheat the oil briefly and agitate with the fryer basket (for no more than one minute). Switch the appliance off and check the temperature before emptying
4. Follow any instructions and use the equipment needed, e.g. a detachable spout for the type of fryer being emptied
5. Using a filter, run the oil into a suitable, clean, dry, metal holding container (plastic may melt) with carrying handles and a cover or lid
6. Place the container on top of a drip tray to avoid any floor contamination
7. Use two people whenever possible if the container has to be moved and secure any lid or cover before moving
8. Place the full container in a safe place where it cannot be knocked over
9. Clean and dry floor afterwards to avoid slip risks

4. Other Safety Precautions

- Ensure the design of the drain-off tap prevents it being turned on accidentally
- Mark the tap clearly that it should not be touched
- Place warning signs near the tap
- If possible, remove the tap handle when the fryer is switched on
- Never attempt to move or slide along a hot fryer

5. Cleaning Procedure

It is imperative that fryers are cleaned thoroughly – to remove dirt and oil residues that could pose fire and other risks. The following checklist should help ensure that cleaning is carried out properly:

1. Check that other activities will not be endangered by the cleaning activity
2. Check that the oil has been thoroughly drained and that there are no spillages that may cause slipping

3. Ensure that the power supply is switched off and the equipment isolated
4. Remove loose debris from the internal surfaces
5. Ensure suitable protective equipment is worn, including eye protection (if appropriate)
6. Thoroughly wash all internal and external surfaces with suitable cleaning chemicals and check for any leaks
7. For stubborn residues, fill the fryer with your recommended cleaning agents and leave or boil according to instructions
8. Drain appliance and rinse thoroughly with copious amounts of water. Rinse all the areas of the fryer with hot water
9. Dry all internal surfaces and make sure there is no water left in the fryer
10. Check drain valve is closed and working properly, refill and switch on as required
11. Resist the temptation to overfill, especially on tabletop models
12. Check equipment is safe

6. Training

Only staff who have received training in the safe use of the cleaning chemicals and the cleaning procedures for the fryer should be allowed to do this task. The following measures should be used to reinforce this training:

- A short, written procedure can act as a reminder to staff for both draining and cleaning operations
- Safety data sheets for cleaning chemicals should be available and staff made aware of these
- Ensure that all training and instruction is understood and is recorded properly

7. Further Reading

Managing the health and safety of catering equipment and workplaces HSE Catering Information Sheet 8 HSE Books 1997

Planning for health and safety when selecting and using catering equipment and workplaces HSE Catering Information Sheet 9 HSE Books 1997

Section 3 - Food safety

The reputation and continued success of any restaurant business depends on its ability to maintain and demonstrate the highest standards of food safety. Customers are understandably unforgiving in this area – even the smallest error, if widely publicised, can put a restaurant out of business.

The key areas to consider when seeking to protect your business from food safety risks are:

Food hygiene

Food poisoning is classified as any disease of an infectious or toxic nature caused, or thought to be caused, by the consumption of food or water. Various illnesses may result due to micro organisms, or less often, by chemical or natural biological poisons contained in food.

The following information provides general guidance on how to minimise food poisoning risks and maintain food hygiene standards. Various strains of bacteria exist which may cause harm (pathogens). Incubation periods range from 2 hours to 5 days. Common symptoms include vomiting and diarrhoea but may in certain cases prove fatal if not treated.

Premises

Design construction and ease of maintenance / cleaning can have a significant influence on the ability to minimise food poisoning risks. Unless there are appropriate controls, restaurants should be sited away from rubbish tips, derelict areas, farms, sewerage treatment plants, or anywhere where pests and sources of pathogenic organism or contamination may occur.

- Allow sufficient space to segregate 'dirty' tasks such as cleaning/peeling from 'clean' activities such as storage of cooked foods, to prevent cross contamination
- Premises should be pest proof; close all windows or fit suitable nets, fill all holes in building fabric, maintain surrounding external areas, pest proof external waste holders

- Allow for frequent cleaning. All surfaces should allow and encourage effective cleaning and disinfecting
- Adequate welfare facilities and provisions are essential for all staff. Toilets must be of suitable design and contain suitable/antibacterial hand cleaners and preferably absorbent disposable towels for drying hands. There should be separate male/female sanitary rooms other than in very small premises and be separated from food rooms by a ventilated passage or intervening ventilated space
- Storage areas require particular thought to ensure different foods can be stored in an environment suitable for it e.g. dry goods, temperature controlled areas, cold rooms, frozen storage
- Ventilation, of usually 15 air changes per hour, is required to prevent the build up of heat, steam, odours and dusts. If natural or dilution ventilation via suitably netted windows is not viable, mechanical extraction may be required
- Good lighting encourages safer working practices and cleaning. It will also tend to deter rodent and pest infestations. Luminance is measured in lux; 540 lux is recommended for food preparation areas
- Work surfaces should be non-absorbent, smooth and capable of easy cleaning. Solid coving should be fitted to wall-surface, wall-floor and wall-ceiling junctions to assist easy cleaning
- Doors should be self-closing, have a tight seal/fit with metal kick plates at the bottom to prevent pest ingress
- The water supply to the premises for cooking, cleaning or which might in any other way come into contact with food should be 'potable' i.e. of drinkable standard

Cross Contamination

Cross contamination involves the spread of bacteria from an affected source to a food or drink source that would otherwise be safe for consumption.

Three categories exist:

- Physical - pen tops, buttons, hair, jewellery, equipment parts, pest contamination e.g. hair, droppings, eggs/larvae, feathers, other food particles, building fabric e.g. paint flakes.
- Chemical - cleaning (directly or from splashing during cleaning) and pest control chemicals, lubricating oils (from poorly maintained equipment).

- Micro organisms – pathogenic micro organisms are present on much raw food, both animal and vegetable. This is normally destroyed or controlled to a safe level by cooking or otherwise preparing it for consumption.

Adhering to the following rules should help to prevent cross-contamination:

- Wash hands after handling food
- Wash hands before handling cooked food or food ready for consumption
- Keep raw foods and cooked foods in separate areas / suitably segregated
- Handle raw and cooked foods in separate areas
- Dispose appropriately of all packaging, boxes and cartons; do not re-use them
- Keep equipment clean and in good repair
- Use separate equipment for the preparation of raw and cooked foods
- Maintain stock appropriately using monitored stock rotation
- Enforce the rules of personal hygiene
- Handle cooked foods as little as possible. If you must, wear suitable disposable gloves and do not reuse
- Keep food covered especially when on display if not in specifically designed containers/cabinets
- Clear waste away immediately, store it hygienically
- Keep preparation areas free from insects/rodents/pests
- Ensure all staff and visitors are suitably dressed and means of physical contamination are adequately controlled
- Prevent anyone with symptoms of diarrhoea, severe nose/throat infection, cough, skin disease or vomiting handling food
- Inform the local Environmental Health Officer or the Consultant in Communicable Disease Control (CCDC) if staff develop illness or are suspected of carrying certain illnesses. This is a legal duty
- Instruct staff to inform management if members of family develop symptoms of gastro-intestinal disorder or upset
- Wear protective clothing including proper hair covering
- Cover cuts with waterproof dressing; keep in place with a finger-stall or rubber glove
- Don't handle open food if you have a septic cut on your hand, even if it is covered
- Never touch food more than necessary

Protective Clothing

In relation to food hygiene, the issue of personal protective equipment aims to protect the food from contamination transmitted from the handler e.g. hair, skin or clothing to the food. A risk assessment is required first to ensure that suitable and adequate equipment is provided. This will depend on individual circumstances in every case. The issue should be recorded per individual.

- Chefs should wear clothing, which completely covers their own under-clothing
- Hair should be covered
- Those cutting meat/poultry may be required to wear protective aprons over their whites and suitable protective gloves
- Rubber/disposable gloves should always be used wherever possible when food is handled. Boots with anti-slip soles should be worn in wet areas. These should be easy to clean and provided on an individual basis

Cleaning and Disinfection

Equipment and working surfaces used in the preparation of food become soiled with the material being handled. Where oily or fatty foods are being processed, floors, walls, entry doors, doors on cupboards, refrigerators and cabinets also become soiled and dirty generating a contamination and food poisoning risk.

- Food debris and grease can harbour potentially pathogenic organisms and may easily transfer harmful bacteria
- Food debris left on equipment may attract pests; food particles may become foreign bodies in subsequent batches. Cleaning regimes should therefore be carefully adhered to.

The image of food premises cooking/preparation areas is highly important. A clean image and strong cleaning culture encourage staff to pursue high personal cleaning standards. An effective cleaning schedule should clearly state:

- What is to be cleaned
- How it is to be cleaned
- When to clean it and how often

- The time needed to clean it
- The protective clothing to be worn
- The chemicals, equipment and materials required
- The precautions to be taken
- The person/section/team responsible for the activity

All training, information and instruction given to staff **MUST** be recorded with the recipient signing a confirmation stating that they have received the information and understood what they have been told.

Floor/dish cloths and string head mops can harbour harmful bacterial and should be disinfected at least daily, or preferably 'use once' disposable items should be used.

Food Storage

Generally, foods prepared to be served hot should be kept for as short a period as possible. Hot cupboards and bains-marie should only be used for maintaining food temperature, not cooking. To prevent the multiplication of harmful bacteria:

- Hot food waiting to be served should be kept at 63°C and frequently checked
- Volumes of hot liquids, e.g. stocks, gravies, soups, should be kept small to allow even distribution of temperature to avoid bacteria multiplying in cooler spots
- Hold cooling liquids in shallow containers
- Use wide low pans to heat, stirring liquids frequently
- Allow joints to cool as rapidly as possible, preferably using blast chillers or cooling cabinets and place in a refrigerator within 90 minutes
- Re-heat cooked foods to a core temperature above 75°C for at least 2 minutes
- Pre heat hot storage units and maintain temperature of at least 63°C
- Always check warm food held prior to consumption to ensure adequate core temperatures are maintained
- Cool storage temperature should not exceed 8°C at any time. Never refreeze thawed food. Quick frozen foodstuffs should be stored at -18°C or below, slow-frozen at -12°C or less

Storage and Disposal of Waste

Much care and planning should go into the safe and hygienic disposal of waste if the preparation and serving of food are not to be jeopardised. Microbial action and pests can quickly undo all the good work done in the food preparation areas.

Restaurant proprietors/managers should:

- Provide suitable internal/external receptacles for waste foods and other by-products
- Dustbins and bulk containers should have tightly fitting lids, be sited off the ground and be of sufficiently robust construction to prevent rodent/pest ingress
- Empty refuse containers should be used inside the building e.g. plastic refuse sacks and should be removed to external storage as soon as possible and no later than at the end of each shift/ working day
- Clean re-usable containers before returning them to food preparation areas/rooms
- Protect empty foods containers (e.g. bottles, trays, racks) from contamination if they are intended for re-use
- Clean and tidy external refuse areas. Disinfect and hose down yards/hard standing areas and surfaces regularly. Disinfect and rinse out external refuse/waste holders after emptying

Pest Control

Pests such as birds, insects and rodents can all carry pathogenic organisms and can contaminate food with their droppings, hair, feathers and dead bodies, or simply through contact. Pests need to be strictly controlled to avoid widespread material damage, prevent financial loss and to avoid legal prosecution and business closure.

When chemicals are used to destroy and control pests, trained and qualified technicians should always be used to avoid cross-contamination. Common signs, which may suggest pest presence or infestations, are:

- Live or dead pests
- Cockroach egg cases
- A distinctive smell
- Damage to building and foodstuffs
- Runways in soil and through undergrowth caused by rodents
- Grease smears left by rodents on walls, skirting boards, table legs, piping and food sacks
- Footprints/tail marks in mud, soil, spilled products e.g. flour
- Droppings

Rodent control

- Rodenticides - These poisons are administered in bait or by contact dust suited to the target rodent. Some poisons take effect after a number of feeds or several days, whilst others may work following single consumption resulting in death after a few days
- Maintain the fabric of the building; ensuring holes are blocked, missing tiles and drain covers are replaced and that doors are tight fitting
- Block any holes or gaps around pipes or cables
- Fit metal kick plates to external door bottoms to prevent rodents gnawing through
- Store all foods off the floor and about 1/2 metre away from walls to aid inspection and cleaning
- Cover water tanks and any other water receptacles

- Ensure no dripping taps
- Keep building surroundings free from weeds and piled up rubbish which would offer nest sites

Insect control

- Use insecticide sprays and powders to kill cockroaches - a second application is required to kill any hatched eggs
- Eliminate cracks and crevices where possible
- Use chemical sprays but be aware of cross-contamination or install and maintain ultra-violet fly killers; a combination of both may ultimately be required
- Fit fly screens to open windows
- Check deliveries for pest presence
- Keep foods covered
- Keep waste bins securely covered
- Dispose of waste suitably as soon as possible
- Keep all doors closed when not in use
- Keep preparation areas and rooms clean at all times
- Practice rigorous cleaning regimes of preparation areas and welfare/toilet facilities
- Clean up spillages immediately

Staff Training

Adequate staff training is essential. All food handlers and supervisors should receive suitable food hygiene training. There are a number of suitable, commercially available, courses such as those administered by the Royal Institute of Public Health to satisfy training needs. It is crucial to remember that all training must be recorded with recipients signing a training record confirming they have received and understood the training. This document should be kept for at least three years and will prove invaluable in any civil litigation.

Section 4 - Help from AXA

Insurance companies hold a wealth of risk management expertise that could help businesses better protect themselves from the unexpected. AXA is dedicated to making that expertise readily available to its customers – to help them do business on firm foundations and manage their insurance premiums.

A wide range of help and advice is available via AXA's small business web site www.axa4business. This includes:

- Detailed guides to identifying, assessing and managing workplace risk
- Advice on where to go for help with risk management
- Small business news and views

www.axa4business.co.uk

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