

7 Simple Steps to Kitchen Safety

Preventing slip and fall accidents in the Food Service industry is easier than you think

Restaurant kitchens are among the most hectic of workplaces—people moving frantically this way and that, laden down with trays and china, navigating floors made dangerous by water, oil and food spills, maintaining a breakneck pace so diners can enjoy a leisurely meal.



According to the National Safety Council, trip and fall incidents are the 3rd leading cause of workplace injury in general. In food service and hospitality, it's an even bigger problem: The National Floor Safety Institute (NFSI) reports that slip and fall accidents are the number one cause of injuries in the hospitality industry, a primary cause of lost days of work and the leading cause of workers' compensation claims. The Bureau of Labor Statistics notes that 22% of slip and fall accidents result in at least 31 days of missed work¹.

According to NFSI, most of the slip and fall accidents occurring in restaurants do not happen in the dining room or front-of-house, but in the back-of-house—the kitchen area. But these accidents are largely preventable with some focus on safety awareness and attention to a few important details.



Follow these seven commercial kitchen safety tips to reduce recordable incidents in your workplace:

1 Survey the scene

First things first: Take a look at your workplace and identify the risk factors and potential hazards that are unique to your back-of-house environment. Are there uneven surfaces or multiple levels? Where are the high-traffic areas? Where do spills regularly occur? Does the ice machine leak? Are the floor drains clear and working properly near the dishwashing area? How quickly does the area near the fryers become slick with grease?

Knowledge is power. Recognizing the hazards and evaluating the risks is the first step in taking action to eliminate or minimize them.

2 Clear the clutter

A restaurant back-of-house can become an obstacle course, creating a crowded, cluttered workspace, littered with trip hazards. Unclear operating procedures lead to poor storage methods, boxes of supplies piled up in corners or hallways, overflowing trash and refuse containers and other physical obstructions. Keep walkways and pathways free of debris and clutter. Never store items on the floor or in stairwells. If there must be cables or extension cords in walkways, cover and tape them down firmly.

Clear the decks. Get organized. Have a standard operating procedure for food deliveries and storage, disposal of waste and maintaining clear walkways that keep kitchen staff safe.

3 Floors are fundamental

Wet or slippery floors are a major cause of slips and are particularly prevalent in food prep areas. Oil, water, food and grease will invariably sully the floor during food service. Proper cleaning procedures go a long, long way in keeping floors safe for kitchen staff. Use cleaning solutions designed to cut through dirt and grease without leaving a slippery residue. Strive to keep floors clean and dry throughout service. Try to follow a wet mop with a dry mopping.

Make it a policy: All spills must be cleaned up immediately by the first person who spots them. Don't wait till service is over. Clean as you go.

Polished or freshly waxed floors can be a hazard, too, and many surfaces such as marble and ceramic tile can be slippery even when dry. The Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) recommends using no-skid waxes and floor surfaces coated with grit to create non-slip surfacesⁱⁱ.

4 Go to the mat

Utilize non-slip matting in entranceways and kitchen areas that tend to get wet. Use well-constructed commercial service safety mats with a slip-resistant, high-traction rubber base that grips the floor as well as provides traction on the surface. Note that all mat types are not always appropriate for all areas; slick, greasy areas could make the wrong type of mat slide.

Put mats down initially on a clean, dry surface, and maintain and check their positioning frequently, making sure all corners lay flat. Caution: Safety mats can buckle and may cause trip hazards, contributing to accidents when not placed and maintained properly, defeating their purpose entirely. Alternative: Use anti-skid adhesive tape in high traffic areas.

5 Sign up for safety

Signs work. They're an easy and inexpensive way for alerting workers and customers to use caution. Always use Wet Floor placards/signage for recently mopped floors, clogged drains and spills that can't be cleaned up immediately. Keep it posted until the area is clean and dry. If your work area has a transition from one floor type or level to another, paint the sections different colors and post Watch Your Step signs. If there are other unavoidable hazards in the environment, point them out with Caution signs.

Other safety alert mechanisms: Make sure your work area is always well-lit, and place curved mirrors at blind corners and areas of high traffic so servers won't crash into each other during service.

SOURCES USED FOR THIS ARTICLE:

https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/2018-11/fy10_sh-2082510_Module_3_Workplace_Injuries.pdf

<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/hospital/hazards/slips/slips.html>

<https://nfsi.org/nfsi-research/quick-facts/>

https://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/atoms/files/takeaway_food.pdf

6 Focus on footwear

Street shoes are not appropriate for work in a commercial kitchen. Require all employees to wear the appropriate protective footwear for their job. Improper footwear causes about 24 percent of slips and falls, according to the NFSI. All restaurant workers, whether working in back or front of house, should be wearing low-heeled, closed-toed slip-resistant footwear for safety. Experts recommend safety shoes with a slip-resistant outsole that offers enhanced grip on wet surfaces, meeting standard safety requirements developed by ASTM International. Slip-resistant safety shoes should also be water-resistant to repel spills and moisture.

Insist that your staff wear suitable slip-resistant footwear, and encourage them to check their treads regularly to ensure they continue to provide adequate slip resistance. Restaurant managers can enforce a slip-resistant shoe policy themselves, or better yet, set up a comprehensive protective safety footwear program including selection, fit testing, training, maintenance and inspection.



7 Get into the safety groove

Create a culture of safety awareness at your workplace. Make it a daily discipline and part of standard operating procedure—such as enforcing a spill policy that requires immediate clean-up followed by mopping till dry. On a new employee's first day on the job, the orientation process should include a thorough review of safety procedures and potentially hazardous work areas. Train all employees on specific hazard prevention techniques and general safety procedures, and encourage them to pay attention to their surroundings and report any problems they notice.

Making safety procedures an integral part of the daily routine will keep your food service shifts more organized and orderly, and your kitchen workers safer and ready to rock and roll.

This information is for illustrative purposes only and is not meant to be a substitute for, or a legal interpretation of, occupational safety and health standards. Please refer to the appropriate state and federal codes of regulations for detailed and exact information, specifications, and exceptions.

ⁱMeasom, Cynthia. (January 28, 2019). Kitchen Hazards and Kitchen Safety. Small Business - Chron.com. Retrieved from <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/kitchen-hazards-kitchen-safety-40195.html>

ⁱⁱSmith, Sandy. (March 2, 2019) Slips and Falls Are Not on the Menu. EHS Today. Retrieved from <https://www.ehstoday.com/safety/food-service-slips-and-falls-are-not-menu>