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Kitchen Place Safety

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One of my first college summer jobs was working as a cook in a local pizza restaurant. I had yet to learn the hazards of working around large mixer, boiling water, hot pizza pans and how to handle kitchen knives, or why I needed to wear a goofy looking ball cap.

My boss was good about telling me how to do things safely. But, one evening when we were busy, I didn't use the pliers to pick up a hot pizza pan and burned three fingers. Now, it was not a serious burn, but the injury was a wake-up call: it only takes a split second of inattention to get hurt — badly — in a commercial kitchen.

Safety risks are the norm in any kitchen. Knives can cut, fires can burn and feet can slip, causing minor and not-so-minor injuries. These hazards are multiplied in a commercial kitchen, where extra personnel, high-volume food preparation, heavy-duty equipment and a quick working pace all enter into the equation. A properly equipped kitchen and a trained staff make all the difference in improving workplace safety in a commercial kitchen.



Lighting and Floors

A commercial kitchen needs an adequate amount of light to provide workers a full view of all food service equipment, food preparation areas, kitchen storage pantries and refrigeration units. Floors should be swept and mopped regularly to remove debris and grease buildup; anti-slip mats will improve foot traction in high traffic areas. Use good judgment with regard to footwear while on duty. Be certain footwear is in good condition and appropriate to your job function and outside weather condition. Floor space should be kept clear of any obstructions or trip hazards, including discarded peels, food packaging, equipment and power cords.

Knife Safety

Knives are among the most commonly used type of commercial kitchen equipment, and therefore, represent one of the greatest safety risks. Storing and using knives responsibly will go a long way toward worker safety. Store cutlery in wooden, butcher-block-type knife holders. This keeps the knives sharper—a sharp cutting blade is safer to use—and prevents cooks from having to root around in drawers in search of them. Save the drawer space for utensils without cutting edges: measuring cups, spoons, spatulas and scoops.



Fire Safety

An ounce of fire prevention is worth a pound of fire restoration. Make sure cooking appliances are completely free of any materials that could catch fire, including refuge, unused oil, and grease buildup and hand towels. In a commercial food service operation it is especially important to ensure that fire suppression systems such as sprinklers and appropriate fire extinguishers are in place, in compliance with local building safety ordinances, and remain operational at all times. Have these systems inspected and tested regularly, and teach all employees how to use them.

Uniforms

There are good reasons to provide kitchen staff with clean uniforms, and it goes far beyond the aesthetics. Food service uniforms are designed specifically to protect cooks from some of the hazards of the kitchen. Flame-retardant material reduces the risk of burns, while aprons offer clothing and skin some measure of protection from hot oil or water. Cushioned, rubber-soled slip resistant shoes prevent slips and falls and allow cooks to stay on their feet comfortably for long periods of time. There are even special gloves to protect hands during cutting and chopping.

Training

If you haven't had a lot of kitchen experience, you might also be unfamiliar with the hazards associated with industrial machines. A worker can be cleaning a machine and think it's okay to walk away and leave it for a few minutes. Meanwhile, another worker might pass by and plug the machine back in, so when the first worker comes back to finish cleaning the machine, it causes an accident.

All kitchen machines need to be safely locked out so nobody hurts themselves. Highly skilled workers can't assume they know it all, either. Even experienced workers need ongoing training and supervision. It's important to stand up and ask for training before doing the next task. No paycheck is worth getting hurt over.

Orientation and training is essential. It must be specific to the workplace and should be an ongoing process. Even an experienced worker will require new orientation if circumstances change or new hazards develop.

Commercial kitchen workers, beware. To avoid getting hurt at work, read your safety manual, listen to your supervisor and follow the safety requirements.

References/Resources:

Workplace Safety in a Commercial Kitchen. By Barbara Stefano
The Heat Is On – Commercial Kitchen Safety. By Christine Blanchette *WorkSafe Magazine*
OSHA – Occupational Safety & Health Administration
<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/hospital/dietary/dietary.html>

Editor's Note:

The KING Safety Matters newsletter is published monthly to provide general safety information. It is not a substitute for adequate safety training, or intended to provide complete safety information or training, on any specific subject. The information contained herein is intended to assist safety efforts, and increase safety awareness.

In order to ensure the contents of the newsletter are helpful and important to you, please feel free to send comments, suggestions and feedback to:

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