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Public Sector & K-12 Education

WISCONSIN SCHOOL TALK

A Safety and Health Bulletin for K-12 Schools From Gallagher National Risk Control

General Kitchen Safety

The kitchen can be a dangerous place to work. Some of the hazards in the kitchen include gas appliances, sharp edges or knives, hazardous chemicals, slip/fall hazards, hot objects, electrical hazards and foodborne illnesses. The information below reviews injury prevention tips to help make the kitchen a safe workplace.

Administration

Establish a kitchen manager position to be responsible for all kitchen operations. Preapproval should be required from the kitchen manager before using the kitchen. The kitchen manager should obtain formal Food Manager Certification training, approved by the county health department.

Burn Safety Tips

- If you take a hot pan or a cover from the fire and put it on a counter, leave a hot pad on the lid or utensil as a warning that it's hot.
- Have portable fire extinguishers available and ensure that staff is trained in how to use them. Obtain professional training from the local fire department or extinguisher service company.
- Kitchen hood fire suppression systems are available. The local fire department is a local resource for this type of equipment.
- Don't let the pan handles on the stove extend over the floor as they can snag on clothing and spill. Turn handles to the side, but ensure they do not extend over adjacent burners.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning can occur in kitchens. CO exposure results from incomplete burning of fuel. CO poisoning can result from improperly adjusted or poorly vented gas appliances. Install CO monitors and have your gas equipment maintained by a certified contractor.

Chemicals

Chemicals can find their way into the kitchen. Examples of some of these chemicals are:

- Drain cleaners, bleaches and strong acids. If these chemicals are used improperly, they can be dangerous. Different types of chemicals should never be mixed, as dangerous fumes can result. Make sure these chemicals are used according to the container labels and chemical safety data sheets.
- Pesticides including bug killers, roach poison and rodent bait should be considered dangerous. If you get them on your hands, wash them off. When you use them, make sure there is no food surface contamination. Be sure pesticides are not accessible to children.
- If you must store cleaning chemicals and other toxic nonfood items in the kitchen, always store them away from foodstuff to prevent cross-contamination.

Flammable materials such as lighter fluid, gasoline, LP gas tanks and other such flammable chemicals can cause fires and explosions. These should not be stored or used in a kitchen unless absolutely necessary. Even materials that are not flammable but can burn, such as charcoal, should not be stored in the kitchen, especially if pretreated with an igniting agent.

Hot Items in the Kitchen

- **Kitchen fires:** Most kitchen fires occur because someone started heating fat or oil and forgot about it. The oil gets hotter and hotter, smokes a bit and then bursts into flames. Hot oil and grease cooking should be monitored at all times.
- **Deep-fat fryers:** Keep water away from hot oil or grease, as it can turn into steam instantly and result in hot oil that can spray in all directions. Be careful when you add food to a deep-fat fryer. If the fat gets too hot or if there are pockets of liquid in the prepared food, the hot fat can react. Watch electrical cords near fryers. Don't leave a cord where something might snag it and possibly spill the hot oil.
- **Steam:** The visible steam cloud is the part that has cooled to below the boiling point of water and is visible as a cloud of condensed water droplets. The invisible part of steam is water vapor that is above the boiling point of water and escaping confinement. It can be highly pressurized and almost invisible, and cause severe burns. Be particularly careful with pressure cookers, steam pipes, boilers and water in other super-heated environments. Provide safety training for using pressurized steam equipment.

Kitchen Electricity

- Examine electrical cords for any breaks, cuts or frayed areas where the cord passes over an edge. Replace damaged cords immediately.
- Don't overload circuits by using multiple-plug adapters or extension cords. If you have old wiring, have it checked by a qualified contractor.
- Try not to use appliances near the sink or other water source. If you must have a wall outlet near water, make sure it has ground-fault circuit interruptor (GFCI) protection.

Kitchen Knives and Sharp Edges

- Meat slicers are frequently used in kitchens. Their high-speed, sharp edges can cause severe lacerations if not used properly. Before using this equipment, obtain formal safety training on setup and maintenance. Obtain proper use and maintenance information from a qualified source, such as the manufacturer or supplier. Use cut-resistant gloves for point-of-operation hand protection.
- Keep knives sharp. If a knife is dull, you have to force it to do the cutting, which creates a hand laceration hazard. Experience is the best teacher, so ensure novice kitchen workers are closely supervised and wear cut-resistant gloves.
- When using a knife, cut with the edge away from your body and fingers. When dicing food items, keep your fingers bent and do not allow them to protrude into the blade line.
- Don't leave sharp knives loose in a drawer. Properly secure knives in the dishwasher. This will prevent damage to the blade and contact laceration injuries. Knives should be washed separately.



- If you are handling a knife and it drops, stand back and let it fall. Don't try to catch it.
- When you are working with a knife, never put it down with the edge pointing up.
- Any kind of broken glass is sharp and dangerous. Clean up carefully and don't leave pieces in a sponge. Don't toss loose broken glass in trash bags to avoid injuring the person throwing out the trash. Wrap broken glass in newspaper or place in a box before discarding to prevent injury.

Slips, Trips and Falls

- Grease, oil, floor-cleaning chemicals and food items can cause slip and fall injuries.
- Properly remove floor-cleaning residue and, if there is a spill on the floor, remove it immediately.
- Glazed floor tile with a thin coating of oil or soapy water can be as slick as ice. Install non-slip surfacing for kitchen floors.
- Don't leave boxes, stools or electric cords in walkways on the floor to prevent trips and falls.

Temperature Control and Food Spoilage

Ensure that the temperature in your refrigerator is 40°F or less and that the temperature in the freezer is 0°F or below. Procure good thermometers for these units, keep them where you can see them, and check them often.

The kitchen is a busy place. Working with these tips in mind will help to make the kitchen safer.

First Aid

Accidents commonly occur in kitchens and employees working in the kitchen should be trained in basic first aid. Always have a first-aid kit in the kitchen. Keep it well stocked and be sure the workers know how to use it. Burns are one of the worst injuries that can occur in a kitchen. The first-aid kit should have professional quality burn medications. Contact the American Red Cross or local fire department for training class information. It is one of the most important things you can do for your kitchen staff.

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