



Kitchen Fire Safety



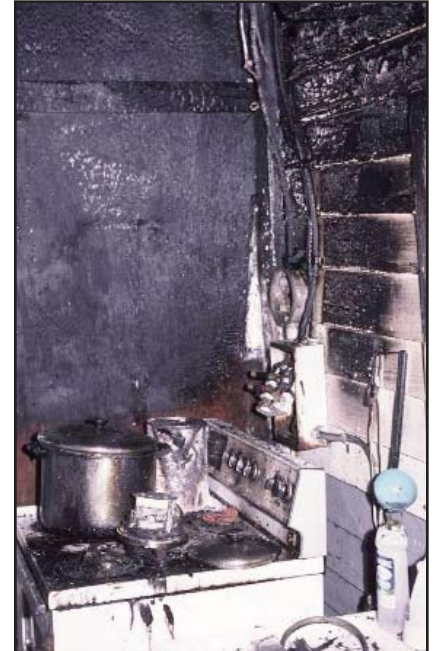
Why Be Concerned?

Kitchen fires occur with needless frequency at residential agencies. A typical claim report might read, "Staff member left food cooking on stovetop to attend to a consumer. When staff returned to the kitchen, the food was burning out of control, resulting in significant fire, smoke and/or water damage." The sobering fact is that these fires are almost always preventable through the application of basic loss control techniques.

Even a small kitchen fire may interrupt service to consumers and leave costly smoke and water damage. Repair estimates of \$5,000 to \$15,000 are common, and larger fires can boost that sum to the six-figure range. While serious injury is unusual, the possibility does exist.

Prevention & Protection

Fire losses are often avoidable, yet they continue to be commonplace, so any effective response must address both those issues. The first section of this bulletin is devoted to proactive prevention strategies that staff and consumers can use to prevent fires from starting. The second section describes how to respond if a fire does occur, using protection procedures and equipment designed to allow building occupants enough time to safely evacuate the building and to notify the fire department.



Fire Prevention - Safe Kitchen Practices

A variety of safe kitchen practices are summarized below. Your local fire department is an excellent resource for identifying kitchen fire hazards and recommending safe practices. The most important point is knowing that the **NUMBER ONE** cause of kitchen fires is unattended cooking. **Please make arrangements today to meet with your staff to review the importance of turning stovetop burners off while unattended, even for brief periods.**

- ◆ Staff should devote their full attention to cooking. If a staff member becomes distracted or needs to leave the kitchen, even if only briefly, (s)he is to shut off the stovetop burners until (s)he returns.
- ◆ Use caution when cooking with oil. Precautions include using the minimum amount of oil needed, using an adequately sized pan, not allowing the oil to get hot enough to smoke, and draining food items before they are placed in the pan to avoid oil spatter. Let hot cooking oil or grease cool completely before disposal.
- ◆ Use only the recommended amount of heat to properly thaw/cook the food. Setting the burners on "high" to thaw or cook food more quickly can lead to a kitchen fire. Use a cooking timer to help prevent burning/scorching that can lead to a fire.

- ◆ Combustible items, such as paper towel dispensers, oven mitts or wooden cooking utensils should never be mounted above or close to the stovetop. Move any such combustible items to a safe distance.
- ◆ Keep the entire kitchen clean and organized. It is important to keep the area free of grease residue that can quickly spread a kitchen fire. Give extra attention to areas around and under the burners, the ventilation hood, drip trays and the filter above the stovetop.
- ◆ Check electric appliance cords and plugs periodically to be sure they are not frayed or otherwise damaged. Do not overload outlets with "octopus" plugs, and don't use an extension cord as a permanent power supply.
- ◆ Ensure that cookware is used as intended. For example, do not use metallic objects in microwave ovens, as sparking will result. Also, only dishwasher-safe kitchenware should be loaded into automatic dishwashers. All other plastic or wooden items need to be washed by hand.
- ◆ Operate the dishwasher and self-cleaning ovens only when a staff member is present.
- ◆ Turn pot and pan handles on the stovetop inward so they will not be accidentally tipped over.
- ◆ Instruct staff and consumers to tie back long hair and roll up long shirtsleeves, if baggy.
- ◆ Clean oven and broiler regularly, paying particular attention to grease and spilt foods.
- ◆ Regularly inspect the kitchen area for fire hazards and correct any noted deficiencies immediately.

Fire Protection

The Role of Evacuation Plans, Fire Alarms, Sprinkler Systems and Fire Extinguishers

These devices and tested evacuation plans are crucial elements to a Fire Protection Plan. If the prevention steps outlined above have failed and a kitchen fire does occur, it can quickly generate heat and smoke.

Properly installed heat and smoke alarms will alert occupants, and sprinkler systems may help to control the spread of flames or smoke, allowing staff and consumers to carry out the evacuation plan safely. Your first responsibility in a fire is to execute this plan. The building and its contents can always be replaced - a human life cannot.



Fire alarms and protection systems ideally include some combination of smoke detectors, heat detectors, manual pull box alarms, sprinkler systems and portable fire extinguishers. Detectors, alarms, and possibly sprinklers, serve to alert occupants when a fire breaks out, improving their chances to safely exit the building. Many of these are also designed to be connected to the local alarm company or fire department. Never assume, however, that the system works perfectly. After the facility has been safely evacuated, call the fire department to confirm that they have received the alarm and are on the way.

An automatic sprinkler system is not designed to extinguish the fire. It is meant to limit the spread of the fire and resulting heat and smoke so that safe evacuation can take place. The system will do so only if it is turned on, properly designed and maintained, and has an adequate water supply. Have a service company inspect and test your sprinkler system annually.

It is important to understand the proper use of fire extinguishers during a kitchen fire. Fire extinguishers are to be used only to evacuate a person whose life and safety are at risk during a fire situation. All staff members need to understand this.

Fire Extinguisher Tips

Hang a portable fire extinguisher in the kitchen in a conspicuous location. It is also important to place it along a path of egress so that the user always has an escape route. A good choice is the multi-purpose, dry chemical type, which is labeled "ABC." This type of fire extinguisher is designed to fight incipient fires originating from ordinary combustibles, grease, oil and electrical fires. Inspect and maintain the extinguisher according to manufacturer specifications.

Have a qualified professional inspect the fire extinguishers on a regular basis to ensure they stay in proper operating condition. If you see an extinguisher with a broken seal or a pin that has been pulled, have it serviced or replaced immediately. The same advice applies if the needle on the extinguisher dial is outside the normal "green" range. This indicates that the internal pressure is either too high or too low and that the extinguisher may not operate properly when it is needed.

Teach staff members how to use extinguishers before the need arises. It is an excellent practice to ask the fire extinguisher service company to hold a brief training demonstration the next time that they service extinguishers in your facility. Teach staff to remember the acronym PASS:

- P**ull the pin
- A**im the nozzle
- S**queeze the handle
- S**weep the base of the flames

Kitchen Safety Inspection Checklist

Staff Training

- Staff is trained to turn off burners when the kitchen is unattended.
- Staff is trained in the purpose and use of fire extinguishers.
- Staff is trained in emergency evacuation procedures.

Cooking Procedures

- Turn pot and pan handles inward while cooking.
- Don't use excessive heat to prepare foods.
- Use cookware only as intended by the manufacturer.
- Use care when cooking with oil.
- Use pans of adequate size.
- Don't heat oil to the smoking point.
- Drain foods before putting them in hot oil.
- Use only the minimum amount of oil and heat.
- Cool hot oil completely prior to disposal.

Kitchen Layout & Condition

- Keep electric plugs and cords in good condition.
- Don't overload outlets.
- Don't use an extension cord as a permanent power source.
- Keep the cooking area organized, clean and free of grease residue.
- Don't keep combustibles in the immediate cooking area.
- Locate the proper number and type of operable fire extinguishers along a path of egress.

Emergency Evacuation

- Have an emergency evacuation plan in effect and hold drills monthly.
- Have alarms, smoke/heat detectors and sprinkler systems properly maintained and periodically tested.

Loss control is the daily responsibility of your management. This bulletin does not include every possible loss potential, code violation or exception to good practice, and is not to be considered a substitute for your own loss control program.

Irwin Siegel Agency, Inc. accepts no legal responsibility for the correctness of this material or its application to specific factual situations. It cannot be assumed that every acceptable safety procedure is contained herein or that abnormal or unusual circumstances may not warrant or require further or additional procedures.