

Follow These 4 New Year's Resolutions For Cleaner, Safer Kitchens

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The start of a new year inspires people to improve their lives. While many focus on personal goals, such as eating healthier, saving money or traveling more, resolutions also can include professional improvements

For restaurant facility managers, the kitchen is one area that is always in need of improvement, especially after a busy holiday season. For a small business, outfitting a commercial kitchen with the right equipment typically costs anywhere from \$15,000 to \$100,000, depending on the size of the restaurant. With an investment this large, it is important to keep a regular cleaning and maintenance schedule to reduce costs and ensure equipment longevity. While high-powered chain restaurants can afford to replace kitchen equipment every five years, as is recommended, smaller establishments can greatly benefit from regular equipment cleaning and maintenance to keep costs down.

Equipment that is not properly cleaned and maintained puts a restaurant at greater risk for kitchen fires. Even a small fire can cause significant damage, resulting in mandatory closure until costly repairs are made. In many cases, smoke and fire damage results in the need for new equipment, a thorough professional cleaning of all surfaces, and replacement of smoke-damaged floors and walls, which can take weeks or months to complete.

The start of the new year is the perfect time for facility managers to get on the right track with cleaning and maintenance schedules. Here are four resolutions to help you create a cleaner and safer commercial kitchen:

1 Equip the roof with a grease containment unit.

Kitchen grease and oil can damage a facility's roof and create a fire hazard. When it comes to containing grease, there are a wide variety of solutions and services, such as full containment systems and absorbent pillow replacements. The best way to prevent grease from damaging a roof is to hire a professional to install rooftop grease containment systems on kitchen exhaust fans in grease-laden areas. Properly designed rooftop grease containment will collect and hold excess grease while allowing rain water to drain off. Stop roof grease damage, eliminate fire hazards and prevent costly roof repairs by ensuring grease containment is part of the kitchen's regular maintenance program.

2 Disassemble ovens for a thorough clean. Continuous use of ovens, fryers and stoves builds up grease and grime, and without proper cleaning, the buildup can cause wear and tear that will shorten the equipment's lifespan. Having a specialist take an oven apart to clean and remove grease, carbon and other buildup also comes with a myriad of other benefits, including greater energy efficiency, shorter cook times, fewer health risks, better inspection ratings, reduced emergency equipment repairs, lower oven fire risk and lower insurance rates.

3 Inspect kitchen hoods regularly. To help prevent unexpected kitchen fires and keep kitchen hoods running efficiently, facility managers should work with a certified and trained professional to conduct routine inspections of the kitchen ventilation hoods. Kitchen hoods collect and trap grease effectively, so it is essential that regular grease checks be conducted on hood fans to prevent fire. Facility managers should also work with a professional to regularly check for blockages in the air vents and ducts. Accumulated grease can easily become a fire hazard and lead to devastating loss of property.

4 Invest in kitchen exhaust system cleanings. While employees should regularly clean kitchen equipment, a professional should be hired on a regular basis to thoroughly clean the entire kitchen exhaust system. Grease buildup inside the exhaust system is one of the leading causes of spreading restaurant fires, and proper maintenance can drastically reduce this risk. The National Fire Protection Association Standard-96, the standard for outlining preventive fire safety requirements in commercial cooking operations, recommends that kitchen exhaust systems be professionally inspected at least once per year. Kitchens that use solid fuel, such as wood or charcoal cooking methods, require monthly inspections. Failure to meet these requirements not only increases the risk of fire, but also can put a commercial kitchen at risk for major fines and mandatory closure. Certified, reputable hood cleaning services typically walk facility managers through procedures, provide before-and-after photos, and work with management to ensure safety and compliance.

While this may seem like a large undertaking, each of these steps is critical to ensuring a commercial kitchen is clean and well maintained. Facility managers should reflect on how to improve everyday processes and help their bottom line. Whether taking on one resolution or implementing all four, facility managers will be ringing in the new year with a cleaner, more efficient and higher performing kitchen.

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