

From The Inside Out

Jeff Dover

Squeaky CLEAN

Ensure your hoods and ducts are properly cleaned

Fires are one of the worst disasters that happens in a restaurant. More than 50 percent of all fires begin in the kitchen and spread into the hood and exhaust ductwork. Unfortunately, many fires begin under the hood and spread into the ductwork, which can result from uncleaned or incorrectly cleaned hoods and ductwork.

Grease buildup from cooking equipment must be properly removed in a timely manner to reduce the chance of a fire starting and spreading. This article describes the key points that sometimes are overlooked in implementing a successful hood- and duct cleaning program.

The Basics

All hoods must be professionally cleaned every three months, at a minimum. Monthly cleaning is required when solid fuel (wood) is being used. This was determined by the governmental code NFPA-96, which sets the standards for ventilation control and fire protection in commercial kitchens.

The following tips can help you ensure each cleaning meets the necessary requirements:

- All grease must be removed down to the bare metal in the hood and ductwork areas.
- Only certified, professional hood cleaning companies can complete this service. Ensure their insurance is adequate and up to date.
- The cleaning company must provide a sticker showing the date of cleaning, the name of the company and any area(s) not cleaned.
- Ensure there are no gaps between the hood filters, as contaminated air will flow into the area of least resistance, bypassing the filters completely. Replace with proper size filters. This should be checked daily.

Reports and Communication

- After each cleaning, ensure the company leaves a detailed report at the restaurant and sends one to the facility manager, indicating all work completed and, most importantly, any issues that prevented certain areas of the ductwork and/or fans from being cleaned.

- If possible, discuss the specifics in the report with the technician(s) who completed the work or with your contact at the cleaning company. Any noted inaccessible areas must be addressed immediately. In most cases, this is due to long ductwork runs that the cleaner's equipment cannot reach. Access panels will need to be installed. Normally these are required every 12 feet of vertical run. Competent, professional cleaning companies will be able to provide these. Due to various ductwork designs, access panels are one of the most important items to have for accessibility.
- Good communication is vital between store operations and the cleaning technicians and their supervisors. The crews should be explaining what they are going to do by first evaluating each cleaning situation. In some cases, pre-scraping is needed prior to chemically spray cleaning the equipment and areas. Store personnel should oversee the performance of the techs to ensure the job is done properly. Due to potential plumbing issues, the dirty by-product should never flow into any of the existing floor drains. It needs to be collected and disposed of properly.

Photos and Grease Containment

- Besides the report documentation, the technician should take numerous photos and send them to the facility manager for complete review. This is critical for overseeing what was done during the cleaning and what, if any, follow-up is needed. All aspects of the cleaning process should be represented. Digital cameras are inexpensive, and professional hood cleaners are making their use a standard practice within the industry. Photos need to show the interior and exterior of the hood(s), ductwork, interior of the exhaust fan(s), fusible links and the area around the base of each exhaust fan. Included in the contract and scope of work should be a thorough cleaning of the roof around the fans, as ponding grease can destroy some roofing materials and void warranties.
- Install a grease containment device on all exhaust fans. This can either be supplied by your current hood cleaning company or purchased and installed through another vendor. Some third-party suppliers will charge a nominal fee for periodic changing of grease containment material, or you could contract with your cleaner for maintaining the device. There are pros and cons for both methods, but photos showing the areas clean and free of grease are a must. This is extremely important in buildings where the roof is shared by several other tenants as some restaurants remove a substantial amount of grease from the equipment under the hood and not all will be blown into the atmosphere.
- For proper grease extraction, the exhaust fan(s) must be operating efficiently with no grease buildup on the blades, housing, motor, etc. Cleaning the fan's components is vitally important, so ensure the fan cabinet is hinged for easy access. Make sure this is noted on the cleaner's report.

Find a Trusted Vendor

Partnering with a qualified hood cleaning company minimizes the chances of a hood fire. Continued review of the cleaning reports and photos are a must to ensure the job is being done satisfactorily. Professional hood cleaning companies provide substantial protection for your employees, customers and brand. RFMA has plenty of great companies to partner with. Feel free to reach out to any of them.

I'm always looking for feedback. Feel free to contact me at (972) 805-0905, ext. 3, or email jeff@rfmaonline.com.

Dover and out.

Jeff Dover's facilities career started in 1985. He has been employed by several major chains (Ponderosa, Steak & Ale, Bennigan's, TGI Friday's, Fuddruckers and recently Five Guys Burgers and Fries). His technical education enabled him to take the lead as energy manager, facilities manager and director of facilities at the various brands.