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No Reservations

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Equipment Assessments: Protect Your Patrons and Your Investment

Proper calibration and frequent assessment of kitchen equipment is critical for achieving and maintaining control over foodborne illness risk factors. Malfunctioning kitchen equipment such as a grill that does not heat evenly, a cooler with an inaccurate thermometer, or a dishwasher that does not sanitize efficiently, can present hidden food safety hazards that threaten the health of your patrons.

Whether your kitchen equipment is new and sophisticated or old and conventional, there are basic recommendations to consider. To begin, never assume your equipment is working properly simply because there are no obvious malfunctions. To protect food from temperature abuse, routinely inspect each piece of equipment to make sure thermometers are accurate and that the temperatures to be reached or maintained are appropriate for the equipment. To protect food and food-contact surfaces from cross-contamination, check equipment containing bearings and gears to make sure lubricants are not leaking or dripping. Also, keep can openers sharp to prevent production of metal fragments that can contaminate food when the container is opened. Lastly, check equipment components such as seals, fasteners, and hinges to ensure they are intact, tight, and adjusted correctly. Of course, always refer to the owner's manual for proper maintenance procedures and, when possible, establish a service contract with a local manufacturer or authorized agent.

While functionality of equipment can impact the safety of food so can the overall condition of equipment surfaces. Because foodservice equipment is in constant use over an extended period of time, food contact surfaces of kitchen equipment can deteriorate. Worn materials can split, crack, or pit which can allow harmful chemicals or broken pieces to be transferred to food. Also, worn materials can inhibit adequate cleaning which can lead to the buildup of pathogenic organisms that can contaminate food prepared on or in the equipment.

In addition to regular inspections and maintenance, it is important that all kitchen employees are trained how to properly operate foodservice equipment. Misuse can lead not only to costly damages of equipment but can also result in food being improperly cooked, cooled, stored, or re-heated. Additionally, some equipment (such as a dishwasher) must be accompanied by a data plate or operating instructions to provide the user with the fundamental information needed to safely and effectively utilize the equipment.

Equipment Assessments: Initial Considerations

Like many aspects of food safety, determining the flow of food through your operation is important for equipment selection. New or used equipment should be commercial grade and constructed following industry standards such as those from the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) and Underwriters Laboratories (UL). Also, refer to equipment specifications to ensure the equipment will be utilized as intended.

Keep food safety in mind when selecting equipment and choose pieces that are easy to clean and maintain. Food contact surfaces should be nonabsorbent, durable, and resistant to damage and all equipment should be free of unnecessary projections and crevices. Stationary equipment should be installed in a logical sequence to avoid cross-contamination and mounted such that it is easy to clean and easy to clean around.

Needless to say, kitchen equipment is a costly investment and worthy of careful consideration. When purchasing new or used equipment, work only with qualified individuals, follow manufacturers' recommendations, and utilize the resources provided by your local regulatory authorities.

References:

National Restaurant Association. ServSafe® Essentials. 5th edition 2008 Chicago, IL.

University of Florida. Food Science and Human Nutrition Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. Original publication date May 2005. Reviewed: May 2008, and February 2011. Internet: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu.

Chinese Restaurant, Issaquah, WA. — December 2012

A Chinese Restaurant, in Issaquah was closed by a Public Health food inspector at 3:40 p.m. on Monday, Dec. 10 for the following food safety violations: Potentially hazardous foods at unsafe temperatures, improper cooling of potentially hazardous food, inadequate facilities to control temperature of potentially hazardous food (hot holding), failure to correct repeated violations. The establishment will be reopened once the inspector confirms that all issues have been resolved.

http://www.issaquahreporter.com/news/183080461.html

Family Restaurant, Oak Creek, WI. — November 2012

The Family Restaurant remains closed after a customer complained of cockroaches in soup. A sign on the door says simply "closed." The Oak Creek Health Department has said it is working with the Prime Table to "remediate the situation. The Oak Creek Health Department has closed The Family Restaurant after a customer complained about a cockroach found in soup. The health department confirmed the existence of cockroaches and has suspended the restaurant's license for active vermin infestation, Health Officer Judi Price said. "The establishment is working with the Health Department to remediate the situation," Price said. http://oakcreek.patch.com/articles/health-dept-closes-prime-table-restaurant

Noodle Restaurant, Westminster, CA. — November 2012

The restaurant's permit was suspended due to an infestation of cockroaches. The health department also cited the restaurant for improper holding temperatures for potentially hazardous food, lock of and improper handwashing, and eating/drinking in the food preparation area.

http://foodinspections.ocgov.com/foodinspections

Seafood Restaurant, Brea, CA. — November 2012

The restaurant's permit was suspended due to an infestation of cockroaches in the facility. The restaurant was also cited for the improper holding of potentially hazardous food, and improper sanitizer concentration.

http://foodinspections.ocgov.com/foodinspections

Mexican Restaurant, Anaheim, CA. — November 2012

The restaurant was closed by the local health department due to an infestation of cockroaches, improper reheating of potentially hazardous food and improper sanitizer concentration. The local health department performed a follow-up inspection two days after their permit was suspended. The restaurant passed their follow up inspection and were allowed to re-open

http://foodinspections.ocgov.com/foodinspections

Greek Restaurant, Buena Park, CA. — January 2013

The permit for this restaurant was suspended by the health department because there wasn't hot water available in the facility. The restaurant was cited for cross contamination of serving utensils and improper hot holding temperatures for potentially hazardous food.

http://foodinspections.ocgov.com/foodinspections

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