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RESOURCES

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Preventing Injuries in Food Service

by Scarlett Sadler

Maintaining a safe food service environment within a public agency is of utmost importance to ensure the well-being of employees, volunteers/students and the broader community it caters to. Given the bustling nature of a commercial style kitchen, maintaining an awareness of coworkers and workflow is crucial to preventing accidents. Food service encompasses a diverse range of preparation methods, and it is important to recognize potential risks in the kitchen environment to continue to operate with safety in mind. The following recommendations are aimed at addressing and preventing injuries in food service within kitchens:

- Workflow and Kitchen Design
 - Design kitchen layouts that minimize congestion and facilitate smooth movements.
 - Designate separate entry and exit points to help avert collisions.
 - Install mirrors at blind corners to enhance visibility and awareness.
 - Ensure workstations are ergonomically designed to minimize strain and discomfort during food preparation.
 - Recommend a pace of only walking in the kitchen area; running is to be avoided.
 - Employ drip mats and non-slip surfaces in moisture-prone areas to aid in the prevention of accidents.
 - Incorporate anti-fatigue mats in areas where stationary work is conducted for employees who stand for extended periods.



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- Training

- Minimally provide initial and refresher training to all food service employees on proper food handling techniques, equipment usage, knife safety, and emergency procedures. Emphasize the importance of safety protocols and risk awareness.
- Train employees in proper lifting techniques, such as keeping loads close to the body, using leg muscles, and avoiding twisting motions.
 - Encourage employees to use two-person lifts, lift assistive devices, or break up the load when lifting heavy or bulky items to prevent strain and musculoskeletal injuries.
- Educate employees on safe practices for handling hot utensils, pans, and trays to minimize burn risks.
 - Display clear warning signs near stovetops, ovens, fryers, and hot water sources to caution employees about potential burn hazards.
- Train employees on how to choose the appropriate knife for specific tasks and ensure knives are appropriately sharpened and not dull.
 - Emphasize cutting away from the body, keeping fingers clear of the blade, and proper hand placement when cutting. Also, ensure proper knife storage when not in use.



- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Ensure PPE such as closed-toe-shoes with slip-resistant soles, hairnets or caps, and gloves when handling food are worn by all kitchen employees when applicable.
 - Loose clothing, hair, and jewelry should be secured when operating kitchen equipment to prevent entanglement.
- Implement regular PPE inspections and replace any worn out or damaged PPE to maintain its effectiveness.



- Housekeeping and Cleanliness Protocols

- Emphasize the importance of thorough handwashing before and after handling food to prevent contamination and illness.
- Instill a clean as you go mindset amongst employees to clean up spills promptly, keep work areas clutter-free, and prevent slip and trip hazards.
- Use caution signs during floor drying times or in areas that warrant extra caution.
 - Be sure to remove the sign once the hazard has been abated or addressed.
- Implement a regular cleaning schedule for floors and other surfaces to prevent the accumulation of debris and contaminants.

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- Collaboration, Reporting, and Audits
 - Foster an environment where employees are encouraged to report safety concerns, near-misses, and incidents promptly.
 - Establish a clear procedure for reporting and investigating accidents or injuries to prevent future occurrences.
 - Conduct regular safety audits to ensure compliance with safety protocols, identify potential risks, and implement corrective actions.
 - Use these findings to drive continuous improvement in safety practices.

From time to time, volunteers may take part in distributing and preparing food. Whenever a new individual joins the kitchen area, additional considerations may need to be addressed, such as educating volunteers on the kitchen rules to include kitchen safety measures, proper attire, and expectations. Furthermore, continuous supervision of volunteers within the kitchen area and assigning tasks that align with the volunteer's age and skill level may be necessary.



The dynamic nature of public agency kitchens, driven by the preparation and distribution of meals, requires a proactive approach to mitigate the risks inherent in food service activities. By implementing best practices and recommendations, public agencies can create a safer food service environment, reduce the risk of injuries, and ensure the well-being of everyone involved in the food service process. It is a collective effort that requires commitment, training and a culture of safety consciousness. For questions regarding preventing injuries in food service, contact [Risk Control](#).