



Preparing for a Fire

Food establishments are at a higher risk for fires due to the use of highly flammable materials such as cooking oil near hot surfaces and open flames. The most common causes of restaurant fires are due to unattended cooking, overheating of cooking oil or fat, and a buildup of grease in vent hoods and ducts. A fire can result in the contamination of food, equipment, utensils, linens, and single-service articles from smoke, heat, water, soot, and chemicals as well as cause extensive structural or equipment damage.

The following information will assist you in developing a plan to prepare for and respond to damage from a fire in your establishment. While not required for an Emergency Preparedness Plan accepted by the Houston Health Department Bureau of Consumer Health Services (BCHS), it is highly recommended that your establishment have procedures in place for fires.

PLAN AND ACT NOW

- ☐ Develop and implement a fire prevention plan that includes regular inspection, maintenance, and cleaning of cooking equipment, vent hoods, ducts, grease fans, and fire suppression systems; proper storage of flammable materials including oily rags used to clean cooking equipment; changing deep fryer oil; cleaning grease pans on a daily basis; and all requirements specified by the Houston Fire Department.
 - ☐ Develop and implement employee training that includes common fire risks and how to prevent them through proper use, cleaning, and maintenance of cooking equipment, and what to do in the event of a fire.
 - ☐ Designate at least one employee on every shift who knows how to turn off the electrical power.
 - ☐ Develop and practice an evacuation plan for employees and customers.
 - ☐ Identify Personal Protective Equipment or PPE (Employee Safety) needed to clean up after a fire.
- OR**
- Make arrangements to hire a professional fire restoration company.

WHEN A FIRE OCCURS

First Steps

- ☐ Do not enter the establishment until the fire department has cleared the building for re-entry.
- ☐ Close the establishment and discontinue all food-related operations including food preparation, food handling, and equipment/utensil cleaning.
- ☐ Notify the Houston Health Department Bureau of Consumer Health Services (BCHS) at www.houstonconsumer.org , chs@houstontx.gov or (832) 393-5100 of the closure.
- ☐ Contact the Houston Permitting Center at (832) 394-8810; 1002 Washington, Houston, 77002; 8 AM - 4:30 PM when replacing large floor-mounted equipment, repairing or replacing interior surfaces, or repairing, replacing, or remodeling the facility's structure. Refer to [Recovering from Flood and/or Structural Damage](#).

- ☐ Hire a professional restoration company.

OR

If using your employees, provide PPE, and train them in the procedures below for cleanup activities and in determining whether food and non-food items can be salvaged or should be discarded.

- ☐ If cleanup starts before a BCHS health officer arrives, document the type and pounds of food to be discarded and the method of disposal.

Assess Food and Non-Food Items

- ☐ Empty out cabinets, pantries, drawers, and refrigerators/freezers. Smoke and soot can seep through closed doors.
- ☐ Refer to the [Food and Equipment Salvage Chart](#) to assess food and non-food items that were affected by smoke, heat, soot, chemicals, water to extinguish the fire, and/or the lack of proper refrigeration.
- ☐ Contact your waste hauler for proper disposal of contaminated food, unusable appliances and equipment, and fire debris. Refer to [Proper Disposal of Contaminated Food](#).

When in doubt, throw it out!

Clean and Sanitize

Do not clean the facility and equipment if the water supply is not potable (safe), the wastewater system is not functioning, and/or electricity is unavailable for heating water and providing enough lighting for cleaning.

- ☐ Determine whether the water, wastewater, and electrical systems are operational.
- ☐ Clean all food and non-food contact areas (floors, walls, shelves, hard surfaces, hardware) affected by the fire, including those affected by smoke and water.
 - o Then wash, rinse, sanitize, and air dry all food-contact surfaces and equipment.
- ☐ Check rubber gasket seals around appliance doors for any signs of damage and be sure to clean condenser coils on the back of refrigeration equipment.
- ☐ Use air purifiers, ozone generators, ionizers, and other deep-cleaning equipment to remove smoke and soot or refer to a professional restoration company.

PREPARE TO REOPEN

Meet the Requirements for Resuming Operations

- ☐ Refer to the Requirements to Resume Normal Operations.

Contact BCHS at www.houstonconsumer.org or chs@houstontx.gov :

- ☐ To request approval to resume normal operations once the requirements are met.

OR

To request a pre-opening inspection if permits and approval were needed from the Houston Permitting Center.

THE BUREAU OF CONSUMER HEALTH SERVICES MUST GRANT APPROVAL FOR YOUR ESTABLISHMENT TO RESUME FOOD OPERATIONS

Please contact the Bureau of Consumer Health Services (BCHS) with any questions or concerns.

4/26/21



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