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## Expert Post: It's Fire Prevention Week – Is Your Restaurant Safe?

*October 06, 2020*

Every year between 2012-2016, fire departments responded to an average of 8,240 structure fires at eating and drinking establishments. These fires resulted in two civilian deaths each year on average, along with 115 injuries and \$246 million in property damage.

This year, Fire Prevention Week, the longest running public health and safety observance on record, is October 4 - October 10. At Society Insurance (<https://www.societyinsurance.com/>), we have been working alongside business owners for more than a century, so we have seen first-hand the devastating effects a fire can have on the establishments that make our communities great.

In addition to kitchen upgrades, restaurants and bars can better protect their building, their staff and their patrons by properly maintaining cooking equipment, avoiding flaming shots, creating safer smoking controls, and implementing the safety procedures recommended by industry experts.

### **The Best Offense is a Defensive Kitchen**

- **Cooking equipment:** Your cooking equipment is probably the most important thing inside your restaurant - and it's also a leading cause of fires. These fires are often due to failed, aging equipment; improper installation and maintenance; poor cleaning practices; and inattentive or careless use. Restaurant and bar owners can mitigate these risks by hiring qualified professionals for installation, maintenance, and cleaning service. Additionally, train employees on proper cleaning, frequency intervals and safety procedures.
- **Rags:** Rags are handy for cleaning up cooking oil and grease residue but they also present a severe fire hazard. Use only commercial-grade appliances and detergents to clean grease-laden linens and rags. Store clean and dirty rags separately in metal cabinets or containers with closing lids. Even clean linens and rags have some amount of grease and oil residue that could cause spontaneous combustion.
- **Fire extinguishers:** Most commercial cooking installations require a fixed fire suppression system that must be certified UL 300 and regularly serviced by a qualified contractor. To provide both fixed and portable fire suppression, a Class K portable fire extinguisher must also be installed and visible. Train all staff on their use.

### **Be Smart about Smoking Materials**

Shockingly, smoking is a leading cause of fires – and death from fires – globally. To mitigate the risk of fires due to smoking

materials, designate smoking areas at least 25 feet away from buildings, combustible materials, vegetation or other trash collection areas. Ashtrays should only be dumped into designated disposal containers with a lid and filled with a medium that can safely extinguish a fire, such as sand or water. A fire extinguisher should be placed in the area with a maximum travel distance of 75 feet away from the smoking area.

### Step Away from Flaming Shots

In addition to severe skin burns from holding hot glassware and cuts from fractured glassware, flaming drinks can spill or crack onto combustible surfaces. And it's not out of the question that patrons could add more alcohol to the flaming drink, causing fire to spread. Tempting as it might be, this gimmick designed to bring in business may be the end of your restaurant entirely.

### Look at the Facts and Cook Smarter

An internal study with Society Insurance policyholders who experienced fires found that the majority of fires were due to cooking equipment, costing in excess of \$5.4 million over a three-year period.

When it comes to your expensive equipment, don't take shortcuts. Get your equipment serviced regularly by an experienced technician. Take a hard look at your systems and procedures - and make changes as necessary to ensure your staff, customers and business stay safe.

### Fire Safety Resources

"Fire!" is a word you never want to hear in your business and it's the call in the night you never want to get. Visit [blog.societyinsurance.com](https://blog.societyinsurance.com/) (<https://blog.societyinsurance.com/>) for tips and trends to help you make smart safety decisions. Additionally, find an extensive Risk Control Library ([https://www.societyinsurance.com/risk\\_control/risk\\_control\\_library.aspx](https://www.societyinsurance.com/risk_control/risk_control_library.aspx)) on [societyinsurance.com](https://www.societyinsurance.com/) (<https://www.societyinsurance.com/>) with a series of free handouts that can be used to assist in training your staff on many aspects of restaurant safety, including fire safety.

*Society Insurance* (<https://www.societyinsurance.com/>) is ready to help you navigate the unique challenges facing your restaurant. Ask your local Society Insurance agent (<https://www.societyinsurance.com/location/>) about specific coverage questions, and read more about our claims process here ([https://www.societyinsurance.com/claims/property\\_casualty\\_claims.aspx](https://www.societyinsurance.com/claims/property_casualty_claims.aspx)).

*This information is provided as a convenience, and it must not be assumed that it has detected all unsafe acts or conditions. This information is not professional advice; it is designed to assist you in recognizing potential safe work problems and not to establish compliance with any law, rule or regulation.*

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