

## **The Importance of Health and Safety in the Kitchen Environment**

When considering how to manage risk in the kitchen environment, care providers often focus on food safety and food hygiene issues. These issues are of course crucial to the safe operation of a commercial kitchen. However, it is important for care providers to also be mindful of the wider health and safety risks which can arise in the kitchen environment and to implement effective procedures to minimise the risk of accidents and injuries occurring.

### **Why is health and safety so important in a kitchen?**

The HSE identifies the main causes of accidents and ill health in the catering environment as:

- slips, trips and falls;
- lifting, manual handling and upper limb disorders;
- contact with hot surfaces and harmful substances;
- dermatitis; and
- cuts from knives.

There are a number of additional hazards in the kitchen environment, such as boiling hot liquids, sharp objects and cleaning chemicals. These can all increase the likelihood of an accident occurring and the level of harm where an accident does occur.

Over the next few months we will explore some of these key areas and look at steps care providers can take to manage these risks.

### **Case law example**

A recent prosecution case demonstrates the injuries that can occur where risks in the kitchen are not appropriately managed. The case involved an accident in a fast food outlet where a 16 year old employee slips on water leaking from an ice-making machine. She puts her hand into the hot oil of a deep fat fryer when reaching out to break her fall and suffers severe burns to her hand and forearm.

There were a number of contributing factors to the accident. In particular, during busy times spillages would often be covered with cardboard rather than mopped up, and although attempts had been made to get the leaking ice machine fixed, no individual had been assigned responsibility for ensuring faulty equipment was repaired. There were also issues on the day with staffing which meant the team leader was working on the tills and so unable to properly monitor workplace safety.

The employer was fined £15,000 following a prosecution by the local authority.

This scenario demonstrates both how easily accidents can occur, and the way in which additional hazards in the kitchen environment can escalate the potential consequences of a workplace accident.

## **Steps to be taken by care providers**

Common issues which can increase the likelihood of accidents occurring include a failure to properly assess the risks of the kitchen environment, poor communication and a lack of allocated responsibility for ensuring health and safety policies in the kitchen are implemented. For example, there can sometimes be some confusion as to whether health and safety in the kitchen is the responsibility of the home manager, the catering manager, the general health and safety manager or the head chef.

Broadly speaking, the steps which care providers should take in relation to risks in the kitchen environment are the same as those which should be taken in relation to other risks in the workplace.

Providers should examine the activities being carried out by employees in the kitchen, assess which of the risks arising out of these activities are significant, and make effective arrangements to control these risks.

As part of this, it is important to ensure that managers at the appropriate level are explicitly given responsibility for ensuring any policies or control measures identified during the risk assessment process are followed. Employees should also be given appropriate training on any relevant procedures, that ensures they understand that operating in a safe environment must take priority over hurrying to get the food out to residents, or any other similar pressures.

Care providers should also keep these arrangements under review, to ensure that they remain appropriate. This is particularly important if there are any changes which could have an effect on the implementation of the health and safety policies already in place. This could be, for example, the purchase of new cooking equipment or the departure of a key member of staff, as care providers often experience particularly high turnover of catering staff.

**Look out in future editions for our tips on how to manage some of the key areas of risk which care providers should be aware of.**

Our thanks to both  
**Anna Hart and  
Francesca Hodgson**