

The Importance of Health and Safety in the Kitchen Environment –

Fire safety in the kitchen...don't get burnt!

In the final edition of our series on health and safety in the kitchen, we consider the importance of fire safety.

As the responsible person under fire safety legislation, care providers have a duty to carry out (and review) fire risk assessments of their premises, implement appropriate safety measures, plan for emergencies and provide employees with relevant information, instruction and training.

Risks

The fire risk assessment should identify potential sources of ignition, substances that burn and people who may be at risk. In the care setting, it is particularly important to identify if any particular service users are at increased risk and what measures can be put in place to minimise this risk. The importance of this is highlighted by the findings of a Fatal Accident Inquiry carried out in Scotland after 14 people died in a care home fire in 2004. The Inquiry found that although there was a risk assessment in place, this did not identify the residents of the home as being at risk in the event of a fire, and paid limited attention to the means of escape.

The nature of the kitchen environment means that some of the potential “hot spots” will be fairly obvious, such as cookers, hot pans and electrical equipment. However, it is important to ensure that this does not cause care providers to miss other risks, particularly those that may not be present at the time of the assessment itself.

This is illustrated by a case study set out in the Government’s guidance on fire safety risk assessment for residential care premises. In this case, a can of aerosol polish was left on the window sill of a kitchen in a care home. The aerosol released a flammable gas cloud after it burst due to heat from the sun coming through the window. This gas cloud was ignited by a lit gas ring, and the window and two internal doors were blown out in the subsequent explosion.

This case study also emphasises the importance of keeping any risk assessments and control measures under review, to ensure habits and practices don’t creep in which could increase the risk. This is further emphasised by the recent prosecution of a care home in London after a woman died in a care home fire as a result of her nightwear coming into contact with a flame. In this case, the home had policies in place to monitor the service user’s smoking and limit her access to lighters but these were not followed. This illustrates the need to ensure that any control measures which are put in place are consistently followed through.

Managing risks

There are some straightforward steps which care providers can take in the kitchen environment to minimise the risk of a fire occurring.

- keep sources of ignition and flammable substances apart;
- make sure the oven, hob, grill, toaster, extraction equipment and any other equipment are kept clean;
- keep electrical leads away from cooking equipment and water and ensure they are not overloading sockets;
- install appropriate fire detection and warning systems, bearing in mind that adjustments may be required for service users with mobility issues;
- ensure the kitchen has the correct fire-fighting equipment and that this is maintained;
- ensure fire exits are properly marked and are not obstructed; and
- make sure employees have appropriate training on the measures which have been put in place.

**We hope you have enjoyed this series of articles.
If you have any queries, please do get in touch.**

Our thanks to both

**Anna Hart and
Francesca Hodgson**

For this article.