



## Maintenance priorities in catering

### Catering Sheet No 12

#### Introduction

Poor standards of maintenance are a major underlying cause of accidents in the catering industry. Including accidents that occur during maintenance work itself and cleaning, nearly two-thirds of accidents investigated in catering stem from maintenance in one way or another. In some cases the problem is a lack of any maintenance at all.

All these accidents can be very costly, both in financial terms as well as in pain and suffering.

Most accidents resulting from poor maintenance involve equipment, but maintenance of the fabric of the building is also involved.

Good maintenance by competent staff ensures that equipment performs well and reliably, and helps prevent accidents. The maintenance work itself must be done safely.

This information sheet is aimed at those responsible for managing maintenance of equipment and premises in catering businesses; it highlights priority areas based on accident experience.

#### Accidents

There are five main types of accident caused by poor maintenance in the catering industry:

- slips;
- exposure to hot or harmful substances;
- electrical injury;
- fire and explosion; and
- machinery accidents.

See Table 1 for guidance on how to prevent these types of accidents.

**Table 1** Preventing accidents

Accident category	Relevant factors	Prevention
Slips	Most slips are due to uncleared leaks and spillages, unsafe wet cleaning methods and not drying floors after cleaning.	To prevent accidents, mend leaking equipment, use lids on containers of liquid being carried, clean up spillages immediately, dry floors immediately after cleaning and repair damaged areas. Display a 'Wet Floor' safety sign whenever a slippery area is not cordoned off.
Hot or harmful substances	The most common causes of accidents are poor maintenance of equipment (leading to leaks), exposure to hazardous cleaning materials and hot oil while cleaning fryers.	Establish safe cleaning and oil draining procedures. In particular maintain and inspect steam plant and dishwashing machines.
Electrical injury	Faults in plugs or cables and poor maintenance of heated food trolleys are the commonest factors leading to accidents.	Regular checks and inspection (see Table 2).
Fire and explosion	Poor or no maintenance of gas appliances accounts for almost all of these accidents.	Regular inspection and maintenance of appliances by competent people is essential. To help prevent fires, remove dirt and deposits in ventilation filters and ducting.
Machinery accidents	Most machinery accidents are caused by incorrect cleaning and reassembly of slicing machines and poor maintenance of guards.	Training of operators in cleaning, assembly, and test procedures; regular checks (for example, daily guard inspections) and repairs are needed.

## Managing maintenance

Where premises and equipment do not belong to the caterer, for example in contract catering in a school, exactly who has responsibilities for maintenance must be clearly agreed between both parties.

In some cases, such as work on electrical and gas systems, there are specific legal requirements on the training and competency of people doing the work.

During maintenance work, both the caterer and the maintenance contractor have safety responsibilities. The caterer should ensure the equipment is safe to be worked on, for example, by keeping the surrounding area clear.

The contractor should ensure that employees adopt safe systems of work and that they leave equipment and premises in safe working order.

When organising a maintenance programme, caterers should identify the equipment or elements of building fabric to be maintained, the actual work needed, the frequency of maintenance and the competencies of the people to do it.

Preparing the programme can usefully be linked to the health and safety risk assessment of all work activities.

## Types of maintenance

There are five types of maintenance to consider:

- cleaning;
- routine checks to detect wear and tear or damage;
- planned maintenance;
- breakdown maintenance; and
- inspections and tests.

## Cleaning

Cleaning is an essential task in all catering businesses. Industry guidance such as the Industry guide to good hygiene practice (see further reading section at the end of this leaflet) gives some food hygiene advice. The following steps are the most important to prevent injury or ill health to staff:

- establish safe methods of cleaning ;
- pay particular attention to the safe use of cleaning materials;
- train and supervise staff;
- clean up spillages on floors immediately;
- rinse detergent off floors; and
- dry floors immediately after wet cleaning and/or if this is impractical, display a 'Wet Floor' sign.

## Routine checks

Check daily for obvious visible wear, tear and damage to:

- machine guards;
- gas appliance controls;
- electric plugs and cables;
- ventilation systems; and
- equipment causing leaks onto floors.

Staff need to be trained in what to look for, what needs inspection and how to report faults.

## Planned maintenance

Appliances need to be routinely serviced to ensure their continued safe operation. This must be done by competent personnel such as appropriately qualified service engineers.

## Breakdown maintenance

Safety-critical repairs must be carried out only by a competent person using the correct components. It is important that functional and safety tests are made before putting equipment back into use.

Sub-standard temporary repairs to keep equipment in use must not be made; they may cause accidents and will contravene health and safety legislation.

## Inspections and tests

Periodic thorough examination is legally required for such things as steam and pressure appliances or hoists.

For thorough examination, inspection and test intervals for these and other items, see Table 2. Examinations and tests have to be done by someone who is competent. Engineering inspection companies are usually used for steam and pressure plant, hoists etc, and CORGI accredited engineers for gas equipment, though in factories use of CORGI accreditation to prove competence is not currently a legal requirement.

The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 have a particular requirement for the inspection of equipment in some circumstances. In general this new requirement does not apply to most types of catering equipment, for which an adequate maintenance regime will be sufficient.

## Food safety

You must think about food safety implications when selecting, installing, using, maintaining and cleaning any catering equipment. Your local environmental health officer (EHO) can give you advice about this.



Industry guide to good hygiene practice: Catering guide  
1998 ISBN 0 900 103 00 0 Priced publication available  
from Chadwick House Group Ltd, Chadwick Court,  
15 Hatfields, London SE1 8DJ. Tel: 020 7827 5882

Safety of pressure systems. Pressure Systems Safety  
Regulations 2000 Approved Code of Practice L122  
HSE Books 2000 ISBN 0 7176 1767 X

Safe use of lifting equipment. Lifting Operations and  
Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 Approved Code of  
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PUWER 98, regulations 26 and 27 MISC156  
HSE Books 1998

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