

Workplace Health and Safety

in the
Fast Food,
Cafe &
Restaurant
Industry

A Guide for Workers



QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT

DEPARTMENT OF

EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING
AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

DIVISION OF WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY

Workers in the fast food, cafe and restaurant industry are constantly at risk of injuring themselves. Burns, back injuries, electrical shocks, chemical irritations, falls, violent assault and cuts are just some of the injuries that can occur. But these can all be prevented. This brochure outlines all of the main risks involved in working in the food industry and gives a few examples of ways to prevent them.

Storage

Manual Handling

Lifting and carrying boxes, stacking shelves and pulling items off shelves all put you at risk of back injuries and repetition injuries. To protect yourself against these injuries, try:

- asking the deliverers to unload their vehicles
- asking for smaller or lighter cartons of stock to be bought
- storing the most-used items in the middle shelves and lighter goods on the top shelves
- asking for training in safe lifting methods

Work Environment

Bad ventilation, cluttered walkways, poor lighting and busy work areas are all problems with work environment. This hazard puts you mainly at risk from heat stress and slips, trips and falls. To prevent these, try:

- mopping up spills straight away
- asking for the floor surface to be replaced with a non-slip material or for non-slip mats to be provided
- asking for adequate lighting to be installed in delivery and storage areas
- wearing hats, sunglasses and sunscreen when unloading outside

Kitchen

Manual Handling

In the kitchen, bending, stretching, lifting, carrying and pushing are all risks from carrying pots and pans, cleaning deep fryers and taking rubbish away. To protect yourself, try:

- using a rubbish chute if one is available
- asking for smaller rubbish bins
- asking for equipment to be put where it provides the easiest access eg. fridge close to workbench
- pushing trolleys and bins instead of pulling them where possible
- wearing heat resistant gloves when carrying hot utensils and equipment

Work Environment

To avoid falling or heat stress in the kitchen, try:

- asking for floor cleaning products that remove oil and grease
- only going into the kitchen when necessary
- keeping walkways clear of clutter
- asking for rest breaks and spending them in a cool area with a drink of water
- wearing non-slip shoes to prevent slipping



Machinery / Tools

Machinery with moving parts and knives cause many injuries in the food industry. To prevent these, try:

- asking that food such as pre-made salads and pre-sliced onion be purchased
- asking that machinery be securely fixed to the bench
- using the right knife for the task and food being cut
- wearing a protective gauntlet on your non-knife hand if one is available

Heat

You can be burnt and scalded when cooking food, removing food and making beverages. To protect yourself, try:

- asking that deep fryers have a gravity feed chute to an external receptacle installed so you do not have to handle hot cooking oil waste
- using automatic food-lowering devices where available
- making sure that all equipment containing hot fat or fluids is covered when not in use
- wearing aprons if provided to protect arms and legs

Electricity

As electric shock can be fatal, this is a very serious hazard.

To avoid being shocked, try:

- asking for splashproof or waterproof electrical appliances to be provided
- making sure electrical leads are not frayed or damaged
- asking that enough outlet sockets are available to avoid using adaptors and extension leads
- where possible keeping leads away from hot surfaces, walkways or other areas where they can be damaged easily
- rubber-soled shoes may provide some protection

Gas

When working with gas, you are at risk from gas leaks, gas bottle explosions and the danger naked flames pose. To keep these risks under control, try:

- following safe working practices
- familiarising yourself with the emergency procedures for gas leaks
- keeping cooking equipment clean
- asking that gas equipment be kept in a well-lit and draught-free area
- making sure you know where the gas shut-off valve is
- making sure you know where the maintenance shut-off valves are on all appliances

Fire

There is a high risk of fire in the food industry due to the nature of the business. To protect yourself, try:

- cleaning exhaust fans and hoods to prevent residue build-up
- disposing of rubbish which may pose a fire hazard
- making sure you know where fire fighting equipment is - fire blankets and fire extinguishers
- not using water on oil or fat fires
- knowing the fire safety procedures and emergency procedures



Service Delivery

Manual Handling

In service delivery, carrying, bending, pushing, pulling, balancing, lifting, reaching, stretching and leaning can all cause repetitive or back injuries. Guard against these injuries by:

- asking that tables and chairs be installed permanently, instead of having to set-up and pull-down daily
- using smaller trays and baskets for clearing tables
- asking that drive-throughs be redesigned so you do not have to stretch through windows or across counters
- not carrying too many plates and glasses at a time
- if a waiter's cloth is available, using it to protect your arms when carrying hot plates or trays

Work Environment

To protect yourself from slips, trips and falls and heat stress while working in service delivery, try:

- asking for a servery between the kitchen and the dining room to be provided
- only entering the kitchen when you need to
- keeping passages and walkways clear of clutter
- cleaning spills as soon as they happen
- wearing non-slip shoes

Heat

In service delivery, you can be burnt and scalded when walking through the kitchen and making beverages using steam or hot equipment. To prevent burning yourself, try:

- not carrying hot liquids or utensils where possible
- taking notice of warning signs regarding hot equipment
- safely operating hot beverage machinery such as espresso machines
- wearing cool clothes to avoid heat stress
- wearing protective clothing where provided



Personal Security and Violence at work

In the food industry, dealing directly with the public can put you at risk of violence from dissatisfied customers and criminal activity. To control violence, try:

- asking that the workplace be redesigned to improve visibility especially from the cash register area
- reducing background noise
- following company guidelines for dealing with an aggressive customer
- following company guidelines for dealing with a theft
- opening the cash drawer only when necessary
- counting cash in a secure room
- telling someone when you expect to return when going to the bank



Noise

Once hearing is damaged, the loss is permanent. There is a noise problem if you have to raise your voice to talk to someone one metre away. In the food industry, typical sources of noise are the kitchen and the drive-through. To manage these risks, try:

- asking that drive-through speakers be relocated closer to drivers so headsets can be operated at a lower volume
- asking that alternative ear pieces be looked into

Clean-Up

Biological Waste

To avoid becoming ill from coming into contact with contaminated waste, try:

- placing waste in specially marked bins
- wearing gloves and a face mask
- maintaining high standards of personal hygiene when working around contaminated waste
- covering cuts and abrasions to prevent exposure to bacteria

Sharps

Penetrating wounds like cuts and abrasions can let infection enter your body. To prevent this, you should:

- follow the company's safe work practices
- wear all personal protective equipment that is provided
- report any injuries immediately



Hazardous Substances

Often, hazardous substances are used for cleaning, for example, oven cleaner. To manage the risks posed by hazardous substances, you can:

- ask that the chemical be substituted for a less hazardous product
- make sure you understand the risks associated with particular substances. This information is available on the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) which should come with the product. The MSDS gives information on the hazards associated with the product and steps you can take to manage risks. Ask your employer to see a copy of any MSDS
- make sure all containers which hold cleaning products are labelled with information on the product's safe use

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