

KITCHEN SAFETY 101: HOW TO PREVENT COSTLY RESTAURANT INJURIES



The United States has more than 1 million restaurants to serve hungry patrons.¹ The industry also feeds jobs, employing 10 percent of the overall workforce.² Given the restaurant industry's size, the number of employees and the type of work being performed, it's no surprise accidents inevitably happen.

"The restaurant industry as a whole experiences high-frequency-but-low-severity accidents," says Mike Keeler, former head of safety at Yum! Brands Inc. and Bloomin' Brands Inc. "But while the restaurant industry may have lots of little accidents, there can definitely be some bad ones. And many of these can be quite expensive."

At quick-service restaurants (QSRs), where food is frequently fried, the most common worker injuries tend to be burns that happen in the back of house (BOH). In the casual-dining segment, where there's more food prep such as slicing and dicing, cuts are the most prevalent injury. Interestingly, servers and front-of-house (FOH) staff at casual-dining restaurants are often the ones to suffer from kitchen-related injuries. In both of these environments, cuts and burns are typically high in frequency but low in severity. So while such accidents might happen often, they usually require only minor medical care.

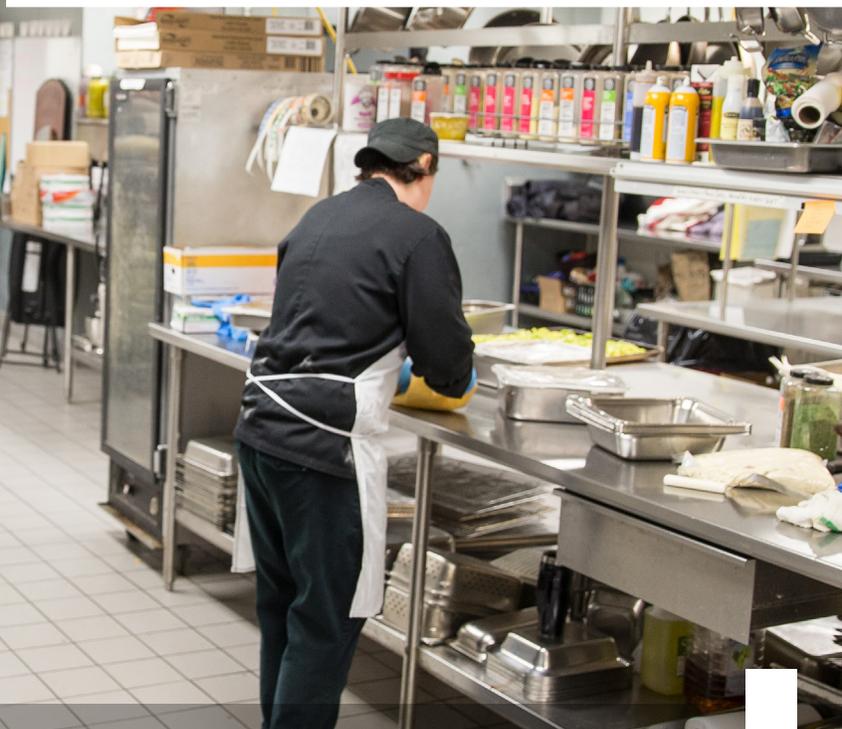
Whether you manage a QSR or casual-dining establishment, these are the most common types of injuries that occur in restaurants:³

- Cuts, lacerations and punctures (22 percent)
- Slips, trips and falls (20 percent)
- Burns and scalds (13 percent)
- Sprains, strains and soft-tissue injuries (15 percent)

Understanding the impact these injuries could have on your business and knowing how to prevent them can help make your restaurant a safer place for your employees to come to work.

SEVERITY OF CLAIMS

- **Only 2 percent of restaurant industry injuries are severe, with claims of \$100,000 or more.**⁴
- **Severe injuries account for 41 percent of every dollar spent on workers' compensation losses.**⁵
- **The top three states for severe accidents:**⁶
 1. California (31 percent of accidents are severe)
 2. Florida
 3. Pennsylvania



The Cost of Complacency

Most accidents in the industry are minor ones that can be remedied for little more than the price of a bandage and some topical cream. However, more severe injuries can be costly, as the price tag that results from a workplace accident can include lost time, medical bills, attorneys' fees, settlements and the increase in insurance premiums due to the frequency of claims.

Injuries such as strains, sprains, slips and falls can be the most serious and expensive types of accidents due to the long rehabilitation period that is often needed. These injuries can happen easily – an employee might simply turn the wrong way, overextend when reaching for something, or struggle to lift a heavy jug of fryer oil without having adequate room to maneuver. Improper lifting can lead to a severe back injury – costing well over \$100,000 in cases where surgery and long-term physical therapy are required.

Treatment costs also escalate quickly with permanent injuries that need continual care, such as second- and third-degree burns that can result from hot fryer oil.

The National Safety Council estimates that more than 25,000 slip-and-fall accidents occur every day in the United States,⁷ so it's important that restaurants take a proactive role in preventing them.

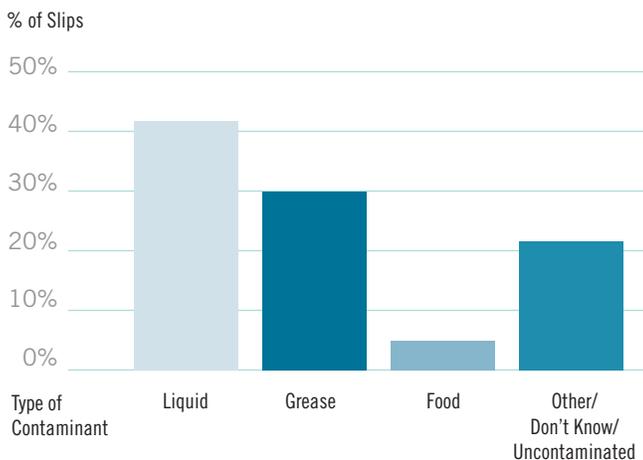
Cost to the Operation

Average number of workers' compensation claims per year: four per restaurant⁸

- Average cost per restaurant per year: \$45,600⁹

SLIPS AND FALLS

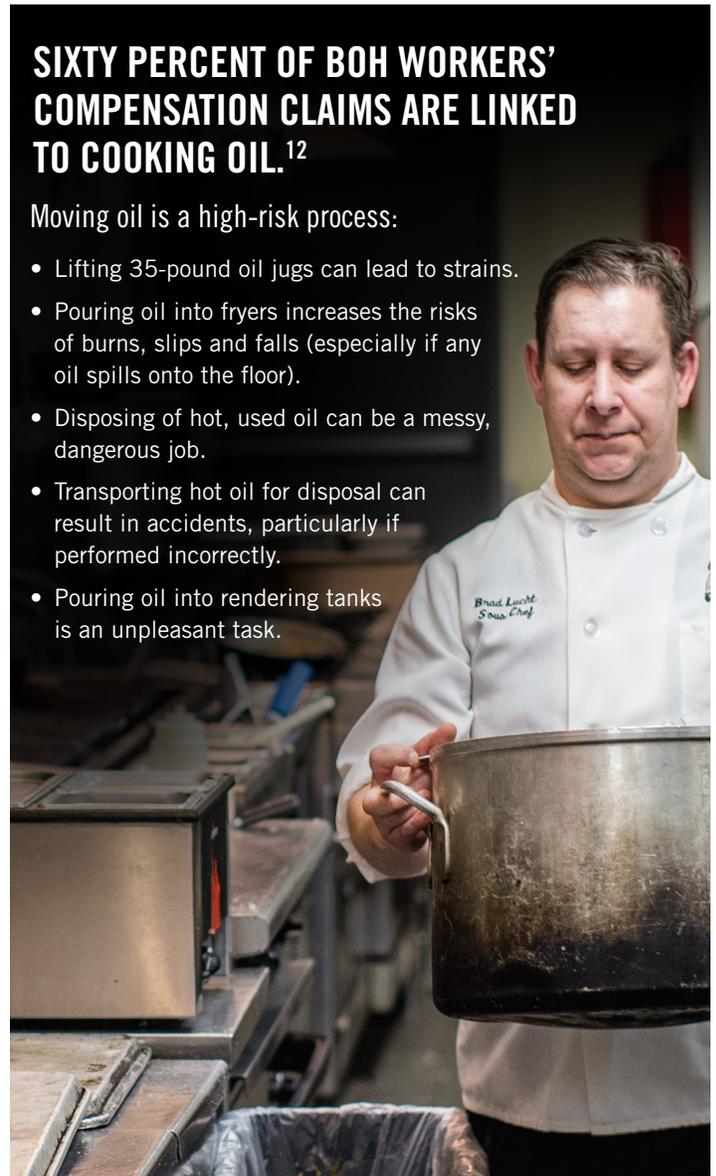
Most slips and falls are caused by some type of liquid, such as oil, or other substance on the floor.¹⁰



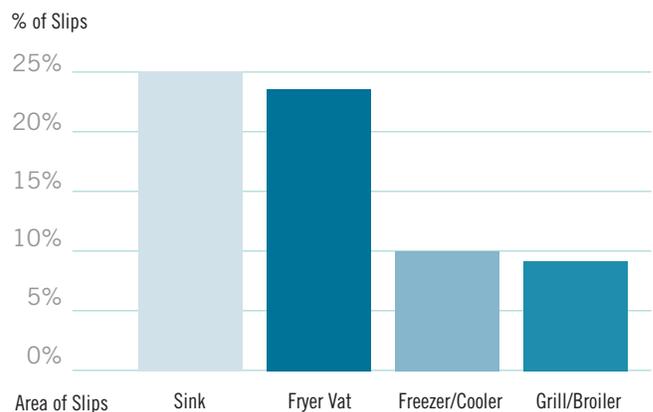
SIXTY PERCENT OF BOH WORKERS' COMPENSATION CLAIMS ARE LINKED TO COOKING OIL.¹²

Moving oil is a high-risk process:

- Lifting 35-pound oil jugs can lead to strains.
- Pouring oil into fryers increases the risks of burns, slips and falls (especially if any oil spills onto the floor).
- Disposing of hot, used oil can be a messy, dangerous job.
- Transporting hot oil for disposal can result in accidents, particularly if performed incorrectly.
- Pouring oil into rendering tanks is an unpleasant task.



And those accidents typically happen near sinks and fryer vats.¹¹



THE PRICE OF PAIN

Severity ranges:¹³

- Average: medical only (no lost time), minor injury: \$1,036
- Average: injury with lost time: \$42,586
- Average: lost time plus minor permanent disability: \$66,704
- Average: lost time plus major permanent disability: \$156,993



Top 10 States for Large Losses

State	% Frequency	% Severity	Average Cost Incurred
California	31%	28%	\$157,165
Florida	7%	7%	\$180,396
Pennsylvania	6%	6%	\$182,647
Georgia	5%	5%	\$181,360
Illinois	5%	6%	\$234,234
New York	4%	6%	\$239,257
New Jersey	3%	4%	\$235,339
Virginia	3%	3%	\$139,032
North Carolina	3%	3%	\$156,031
Louisiana	3%	3%	\$159,350

While these numbers are often rolled into the cost of doing business, the impact on the restaurant and its employees is more real when put into context. For instance, you'd need to sell 3,000 QSR meals or 1,300 casual-dining meals to cover the cost of the average workers' compensation claim.¹⁴

Then there is the personal cost that is not typically represented in published safety statistics.

"With accidents, people's lives can change quite dramatically," Keeler says. "There are scars, tissue damage, bone damage – and even drug addiction that can result from taking prescription pain medication. In the first year of treatment, most injury costs are a result of tests, diagnoses and surgeries."

In fact, the National Safety Council reports that 25 percent of workers' compensation prescription drug claim costs were for opioid pain medications,¹⁵ and this dependency sometimes turns into addiction.¹⁶ "Because workers' compensation claims can be lifetime claims in some states, this can become a real problem for both employee and employer," Keeler says.

Accident statistics typically reflect reportable injuries and are based on a medical bill that's been paid. But for every accident that requires medical treatment, there are an equal number of employees who don't seek medical care with burns, cuts, bruises or strains. Even so, these mild injuries can hurt the restaurant's bottom line in terms of lost time and revenue.

According to studies from OSHA, for every \$1 spent on safety programs, businesses can save \$4 to \$6 in costs associated with injuries and fatalities.¹⁷

SLIPPERY SLOPE

- Average lost time for a slip-and-fall accident can be 418 days¹⁸
- The average QSR slip-and-fall claim costs \$5,800¹⁹
- Litigation costs can often reach as much as \$100,000 per incident²⁰
- Slip-and-fall lawsuits have risen by over 300 percent since 1980²¹

Follow the Letter of the Law

If preventing the personal harm related to workplace injuries isn't enough to encourage safety-compliance initiatives, there are also the potential fines the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) could levy. Many restaurant operators are hit with fines because they don't take the time to learn the OSHA regulations and keep up to date with revisions.

As of Aug. 1, 2016, the Department of Labor has implemented new rules to adjust civil penalty amounts. The rules update some penalties that have long lost ground to inflation. Here's what you need to know:

- OSHA's maximum penalties, which have not been raised since 1990, have been increased by 78 percent.
- The top penalty for serious violations rose from \$7,000 to \$12,471.
- The maximum penalty for willful or repeated violations increased from \$70,000 to \$124,709.

The good news is these maximum penalties can be avoided. First, adhere to the child-labor laws in your state. Second, follow the Hazard Communication Standard, which requires information about the identities and hazards of the chemicals (including seemingly benign items such as dish soap and cleaning products) used in your restaurant be available to workers. Labels and material safety data sheets must be provided, and workers need to be trained on how to properly handle any chemicals.

Lead by Example

Training employees to follow proper safety protocol hinges on your leadership skills. It's important to make safety an integral part of an organization's core business objectives. That means talking to employees about safety in the same way you discuss labor, food costs, turnover and equipment. Provide proper training to reinforce safety compliance.

"If you want people to do something right, you need to demonstrate it every day," Keeler says. "For instance, if you, as a boss, walk past a spilled soda, it shows other people that it's OK to ignore it. But when people see the boss cleaning it up, they realize they should have cleaned it up first. Likewise, when managers use a cut-resistant glove, employees will, too. Your behavior sets the tone, and this is how the best managers operate."



WORKERS UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE ARE PROHIBITED FROM:²²

- Operating or cleaning power-driven equipment such as meat slicers and dough mixers
- Operating, loading or unloading scrap-paper baler or paper-box compactors
- Driving a motorized vehicle such as a forklift
- Making pizza deliveries
- Working past 8 p.m. without supervision by an on-site employee 18 years or older

TEEN ACCIDENTS BY THE NUMBERS:

- The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) estimates emergency rooms treated approximately 44,800 injuries suffered by teenage restaurant workers. Most of these injuries occurred in QSRs.²³
- Half of these injuries involved hot oil; and wet or greasy floors caused more than half of the injuries from falls.²⁴
- Teens working in restaurant kitchens are six times more likely to be burned than teens working in any other industry.²⁵



A Menu for Prevention

The most effective way to avoid costly medical and legal claims and keep employees safe is to prevent accidents in the first place. The checklist below can help you pay special attention to specific areas:



TRAINING

- Include a safety training module once per quarter at team meetings.
- Educate workers on basic hygiene and safety protocols.
- Train employees on the use of first-aid items.
- Make sure training manuals are translated for those employees who are not fluent in English.



SAFETY EQUIPMENT

- Stock a first-aid cabinet with supplies for treating common injuries.
- Keep fire extinguishers nearby and inspect them regularly.
- Make sure employees wear slip-resistant shoes, cut-resistant gloves and eye protection when appropriate.
- Have a safety shoes program with a payroll deduction option and a clear policy on safety footwear.



KITCHEN APPLIANCES AND UTENSILS

- Turn handles away from burners.
- Adjust burner flames to cover only the bottom of the pan.
- Do not leave hot grease unattended.
- Cover fryers when not in use.
- Use a closed-loop oil management system.
- Install protective guards on all slicing equipment.
- Keep knives properly sharpened.



FLOORS AND WALKWAYS

- Display signs to identify wet floors.
- Use floor mats to prevent slips and falls.
- Do not allow employees to lift heavy boxes or objects on their own.

BASIC FIRST-AID SUPPLIES:

- Over-the-counter medications such as ibuprofen
- Astringents and skin cleansers to flush/soak surface wounds
- Sprays and gels to treat minor burns
- Bandages, butterfly bandages, elastic bandages or gauze pads
- Tweezers

*Most food suppliers can provide an OSHA-approved first-aid kit.

FOR SERIOUS INJURIES, CALL 911 AND FOLLOW THESE STEPS:

- Keep everything as it was at the time of the accident, in case of pending investigation.
- Accompany the injured employee to the clinic or hospital, if necessary.
- Alert management to the incident and notify the worker's emergency contact.
- Keep a record of the injury.

HOW TO HANDLE CUTS:

- Notify your supervisor that you've cut yourself.
- Vacate the food-prep area.
- Disinfect the area and discard affected food.

WANT TO LEARN MORE? RESOURCES:

1. [U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety & Health Administration \(OSHA\) Young Worker Safety in Restaurants](#)
2. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
3. [National Safety Council](#)
4. [National Restaurant Association](#)
5. [Burn Foundation](#)
6. [U.S. Department of Labor Civil Penalty Adjustments](#)

Another way to prevent slips, falls, strains and burns that result from fryer oil is to install an oil management system. For many Restaurant Technologies customers, this system has resulted in a 60 percent reduction in workers' compensation incidents, or an \$8,000 to \$17,000 cost reduction per year.

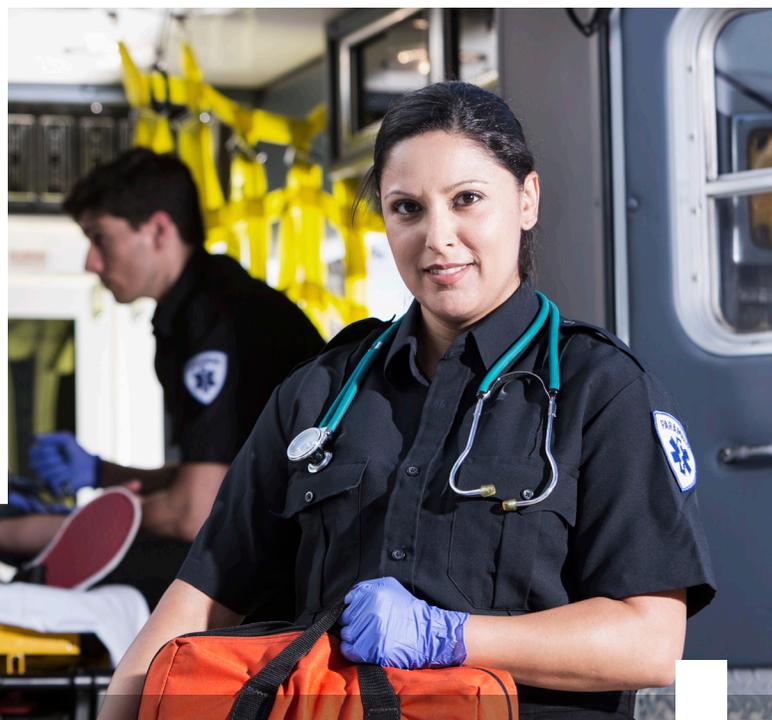
Protect Your Most Valuable Asset

Your employees are your most important asset and should be your No. 1 priority. When safety is a strategic and integral part of every shift, injuries can often be prevented.

"If you think about it, there's no such thing as an accident, because 99 percent of accidents are preventable," Keeler says. "At the end of the day, when we talk about the common causes of restaurant accidents, they happen when employees have not followed safety protocol and procedures. Nothing is so important that it can't be done safely."

Many restaurants go years without a reportable accident, yet some last only months or weeks. It all has to do with the safety training that is established and the behavior that is expected. When managers have high expectations for safety compliance and treat it as importantly as other organizational goals, your restaurant becomes safer for everyone.

If it's not an emergency that requires immediate care, many workers' compensation insurance providers have 24-hour, on-call nurses who can triage injuries. Contact your provider for information.



About Restaurant Technologies™

A trusted partner for more than 15 years, Restaurant Technologies is the leading provider of cooking-oil management to more than 23,000 national quick-serve and full-service restaurant chains, independent operators, grocery delis, hotels, casinos, universities and hospitals. Restaurant Technologies helps food service operators make their kitchens safer, smarter, more efficient and more sustainable through its automated oil storage, handling, filtration monitoring and disposal management system. Headquartered in Mendota Heights, Minn., Restaurant Technologies is a privately held company, currently operates 40 depots and has more than 750 employees serving customers across the United States. For additional Restaurant Technologies information and news, visit www.rti-inc.com. Follow Restaurant Technologies on Twitter @RTloil, on LinkedIn or Facebook.

SOURCES:

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- ²⁴ Ibid.
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