

# Stay Safe in the Restaurant

This material was edited under grant # SH22303SH1 (produced under grand # SH19478SH9 Restaurant Opportunities Centers United) from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, U.S. Department of Labor. It does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Labor, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

## What are some of your rights and responsibilities under OSHA?

### Employers must:

- *Furnish to each of his/her employees* a place of employment which is free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his/her employees.
- Inform employees of the existence, location and availability of your medical and exposure records when you first begin employment and at least annually thereafter. Employers also must provide these records to you or your designated representatives within 15 working days of your request.

### Employees can:

- File a complaint with OSHA if you believe that there are either violations of OSHA standards or serious workplace hazards.
- Request information from your employer on safety and health hazards in the workplace, chemicals used in your workplace, tests the employer has done to measure chemical, noise and radiation levels, precautions the employer should take and procedures to be followed if you or other employees are involved in an incident or are exposed to hazardous chemicals or other toxic substances.
- Request copies of appropriate standards, rules, regulations and requirements that your employer should have available at the workplace.
- Review the Log and Summary of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses (OSHA 300) at a reasonable time and in a reasonable manner or have an authorized representative do so for you.
- Access relevant exposure and medical records.

- [3]

## SECTION 1

### Restaurant Work Can Be Dangerous to Your Health

If you want to make your workplace safer, start by *talking to your co-workers*. Gather information about the hazardous conditions in your workplace. There are many ways to find out what your coworkers are worried about. Talk informally with co-workers. Draw a map of all of the hazards in your workplace. Ask coworkers to fill out a survey. Once you have identified the problem, you can look for ways to get rid of the hazard or make it less dangerous.

---

#### Discussion Question:

**What are some of the ways you can gather information about health and safety problems in your restaurant?**

### SECTION 1 SUMMARY:

Working in a restaurant can be dangerous and unhealthy.

A *workplace hazard* is anything on the job that can hurt you or make you sick. Ergonomics is the science of designing the workplace to fit the worker, rather than expecting a worker to fit into a job that has not been designed correctly.

There are many hazards that can be found in restaurants.

---

#### Ergonomic Hazards:

- Lifting heavy boxes or objects that shouldn't be lifted by one person without the help of assist devices or helpers. Working in unnatural or awkward positions can lead to strains, sprains, muscle pain and nerve damage in the neck, upper and lower back, shoulders, elbows, forearms, wrists and fingers.
- Standing for long periods of time in one position on a hard surface can lead to muscle fatigue, back pain and soreness in legs and feet.
- Cutting with a knife that is not razor sharp can increase the force you have to use in your fingers, wrists, forearms, elbows, shoulders and upper back. Many repetitive tasks can lead to fatigue, soreness and injury.

#### Other Hazards:

- **SLIPS/TRIPS and FALLS:** Wet and slippery floors, spills and lack of housekeeping can cause slips, trips and falls.
- **BURNS:** Hot surfaces, deep fryers and hot grease can cause burns.
- **CUTS:** Slicing and baking machines that do not have guards can cause cuts. Sometimes the guards aren't working. Broken dishware can also cause cuts.
- **CHEMICALS:** Exposure to cleaning, disinfecting and maintenance chemicals may lead to respiratory

problems, skin and eye irritation.

- **ASSAULT:** A lack of basic security measures can lead to incidents of workplace violence. The worker who handles cash has special risks.

## **SECTION 2**

### **Let's Talk About It: How You Can Make Your Workplace Safer**

Discussion Questions:

In your small group, discuss some of the things you can do to:

- 1) Prevent back strains and sprains
- 2) Prevent injuries to our legs and feet
- 3) Prevent strains and sprains to our shoulders, necks, arms and hands
- 4) Prevent nerve injuries to our arms and wrists
- 5) Prevent cuts with knives, or cutting fingers on machines
- 6) Prevent burns
- 7) Prevent slips and falls

## SECTION 3

### Your Body and Physical Work

THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF LIFTING TASKS: There are lifting tasks that most workers can do safely without getting hurt and there are lifting tasks that shouldn't be done by people because they carry too great of risk of getting hurt - -- badly hurt.

You know a lot about your job. You know what is hard to do, what is easy to do, and what hurts. If something you do everyday makes you feel like you are straining - - - or in pain - - then listen to that voice. This is important information that you can use to help make your workplace safer for EVERYONE.

#### IF THE LIFT IS SAFE TO DO, HERE ARE NINE IMPORTANT TIPS TO SAFER LIFTING:

1. Stretch and warm up your shoulders, arms, wrists, knees, legs, feet, and belly (torso). This will help you lift with a straight back and flexible shoulders. Make sure that your elbows, wrists, hips, knees and ankles are warmed up too. The flexibility from stretching will help you move easier.
2. Fast stretching is bad for you. Try to stretch very slowly for about 10 minutes. Stretch by gently and slowly moving both arms in a big circle, gently twisting your torso from side to side and front and back, and moving your legs in a big circle, one at a time.
3. Plan ahead. Answer these questions for yourself:
  - Where is the load going?
  - Should I use a cart or a hand-truck to reach the destination?
  - Will help be needed with this load?
  - Any obstacles along the way that should be moved first?
  - Does any strapping material need to be removed?
  - Is the floor slippery?
  - Where is the best place to grip the load?
4. Keep the load as close to your body as possible. If the load is heavier on one side than the other, keep the heaviest part of as close to your belly as possible.
5. Keep your body stable by keeping your legs apart and one leg slightly forward for balance. Avoid any extra bending of the back.
6. Avoid all twisting. The load should be right in front of you. It is very hard on the back when the load weight is to the right or the left of your body.
7. Keep your movements smooth. Don't lift quickly and don't jerk the load. Your back needs those slow movements to use all of your muscles in the best way possible.

8. Don't lift anything that is too heavy. Your body has limits. Good posture and proper technique cannot protect you from injury when the load is too heavy. See if there is a way to remove some of the weight or lighten the load before starting.
9. Put the load DOWN if the lift isn't going well. Take a moment to figure out a better plan or to get a lifting device or a second person. It is better to move small weights more often and heavy loads less often. If the load is way too heavy then do everything possible to (1) lighten the load, (2) handle the load with equipment, and (3) ask for help to solve the problem.



## SECTION 4

### Let's Fix It: Preventing Muscle, Joint and Nerve Injuries Through Better Workplace Design and Preventing Accidents

Ergonomics is the science of designing the workplace to fit the worker, rather than expecting a worker to fit into job that has not been designed correctly.

A poorly designed workplace puts workers at risk of getting hurt. These physical hazards include:

- unnatural and awkward body positions
- continuously performing the same motion (repetitive motions) during a work shift
- standing for long periods of time in one spot
- manual handling (lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling, carrying, holding, filling, emptying) heavy and awkward boxes, crates, trays, equipment or garbage

These hazards can cause injuries to develop slowly over time, like a very sore shoulder, or the injuries can happen suddenly. Most people call these sudden events “accidents”. We know that MOST accidents can be prevented. Serious injuries can happen in the restaurant due to:

- slippery floors, poor lighting
- hot stoves, grills, oil and grease
- knives and unguarded machines

These injuries are more likely to happen if you are moving or carrying heavy loads, or working under a lot of time pressure or working long hours. One hazard can cause ANOTHER hazard.

#### **FIXING THE PROBLEM: THERE ARE THREE WAYS TO WORK SAFER.**

**ONE:** Eliminate the hazards so that workers can't go near them

ONE is most important. When we use equipment or machines to eliminate or reduce a hazard we call this “engineering controls.” Examples include:

- Lifting devices
- Lift tables
- Work surfaces at different height to prevent reaching and bending

**TWO:** Change the way the work is done by workers so there is less contact with hazards

TWO is next in importance. Examples of “changing the work” include:

- Taking more rest breaks to allow your body to recover
- Adjust the pace of the job so that you are not working as rushed
- Rotating workers so everybody shares the load and does less tiring tasks during the day
- Improving your kitchen tool maintenance schedule so that knives are ALWAYS sharp

**THREE:** Put protective equipment on the workers’ bodies.

Personal protective equipment should be the last resort when no other control method is possible. Sometimes the best solution is to use a combination of two or all of the strategies. The decision will usually be based on the task demands, equipment availability and restaurant resources.

The way your tasks are organized by supervisors and owners is very important. Policies and procedures can help make work SAFER and can reduce physical hazards and other safety issues.

---

## **HOW CAN WORK GUIDELINES AND POLICIES MAKE WORK HEALTHIER?**

Adequate rest breaks, less overtime, paid sick days and vacation days can reduce the amount of time you are exposed to the health hazard. They also give you more time for your body to heal.

Better staffing can reduce how much work you have to get done. This can lower the time pressure and help you work at a safer speed. This is very important for preventing strains and sprains.

Fair and equal opportunities for promotion help workers to move up to better jobs over time. Often higher paying jobs have less injury hazards.

Training workers to understand “ergonomics” and to fix problem job tasks can increase their awareness of all hazards.

Training workers in proper work methods and practices helps promote safe and healthy work.

When restaurant workers come together to exercise their rights – to have a “voice” – they can talk to management and discuss and negotiate ways of making work safer and healthier.

## **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO REPORT YOUR FIRST SIGNS OF INJURY?**

The first symptoms of injury are NOT always pain. Workers can experience fatigue, soreness, discomfort, aching, burning, weakness, numbness and tingling in their hands, arms, shoulders, backs or legs either on or off the job.

The first step to stopping and reversing the damage to your body is to get help as soon as you feel these symptoms. It is very important to report your problem as soon as possible to your boss and to your doctor or clinician.

The sooner you recognize and report these problems, the greater the chance of having a full medical recovery and the faster you can get help figuring out what part of the job task needs to be fixed or changed.

---

## **REAL SOLUTIONS FOR EMPLOYERS AND WORKERS**

To reduce work hazards, job safety and health experts recommend two types of solutions – making sure the restaurant has the right equipment to prevent hazards (“Equipment” solutions), and carrying out the work in a way that reduces the chance of such hazards happening (“work practice” solutions) . Below are eight types of hazards, and the kinds of solutions our experts recommend to address them.

### **HAZARD #1: UNNATURAL OR AWKWARD POSTURES**

Unnatural or awkward postures can include bending, reaching, kneeling, squatting, lifting, lowering and carrying. Sometimes you need to hold a pot, pan, container, vat, case of liquid, or keg in an uncomfortable way. There are many things that restaurant owners, managers and workers can do to reduce the strain from awkward postures on your body:

#### **IN THE KITCHEN, THE OWNERS AND MANAGERS OF A RESTAURANT SHOULD:**

- ☐ Buy countertops and cutting surfaces that can be adjusted to the right height for different workers.  
Two additional levels of shelving can be helpful too.
- ☐ Buy dish racks and refrigerators that are easy to reach. Your “power range” is from your hips to your chest.
- ☐ Limit the depth of refrigerators to about 18 inches.
- ☐ Install dumbwaiters to transfer food products between floors.
- ☐ Install sinks that are at the height of most workers’ hips. This helps prevent strain in dishwashing tasks.
- ☐ Install machines that help with pours. **(See Figures 1 and 2)**
- ☐ Design aisles in the kitchen area that are at least 4 feet wide. This is very important between workstation and the grill, oven or stove.
- ☐ Buy hand trucks and conveyors to move products in and trash out.
- ☐ Install shelves for runners to pick up food from cooks that are in the “power range”.
- ☐ Buy rolling stairs with rails on both sides to reach items on high shelves.
- ☐ Buy thick rubber mats for use when kneeling.

- ☐ Make sure that all the equipment, utensils, pots and pans needed in the kitchen are within reach of the shortest worker.

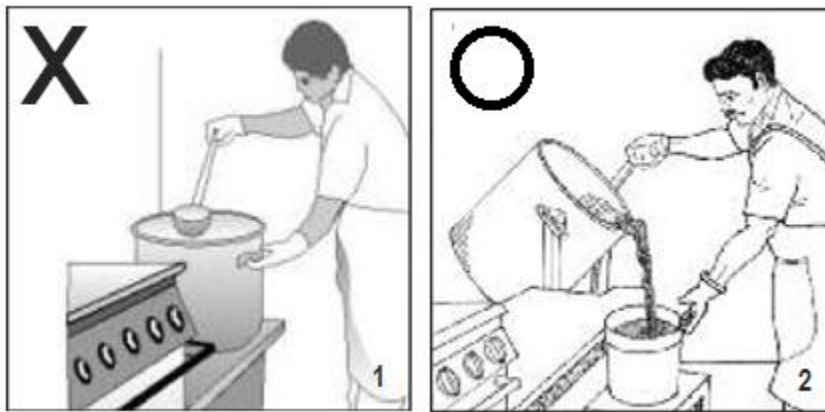


Figure 1: DON'T DO. Figure 2: DO.

Unnatural or awkward postures can include bending, reaching, lifting, carrying and lowering. To reduce this hazard, use equipment to assist with pours.

#### **IN THE FRONT OF THE HOUSE, THE OWNERS AND MANAGERS SHOULD:**

- ☐ Install coat racks that are at chest height.
- ☐ Install computer workstations for ordering that are adjustable with touch screens.
- ☐ Install lights with dimmers that direct light upward, towards the ceiling -- at ordering computer workstations.
- ☐ Install menu boxes at chest height.
- ☐ Install storage space for glassware, dishes and cutlery from hip height to chest height.
  - Buy bar refrigerators that are from hip height to chest height.
  - Limit depth of refrigerators to about 18 inches.
  - Install hip-height bar sinks, and ice storage at bars.
- ☐ Install alcohol bottle storage that is between workers' hip and shoulder height.
- ☐ Design at the bar is important too. The distance between the bartender and customer should be less than 22" deep.

#### **THE WORKERS IN THE RESTAURANT SHOULD:**

- ☐ Store heavy and frequently used items on racks that are no lower than hip height and no higher than chest height.
- ☐ Limit very low and overhead storage to items not often used.
- ☐ Rather than bending, stooping or kneeling, work at levels between your hips and chest. (See Figures 3 and 4, and 5 and 6)



**Figure 3: DON'T DO. Figure 4: DO.** Unnatural or awkward postures can include bending, stooping and reaching. Awkward postures can hurt your neck, shoulders, lower back and hips. Rather than bending, stooping or reaching, work in your power zone, between your hips and chest. You should work in your power zone while sweeping the floor. Low brooms will cause you to lean, bend, stoop and reach. Brooms with longer handles help you work more safely.

Sit on a low bench or stool for work that needs to be done at ground level.

- ☐ Use tools with longer handles. (See Figures 3 and 4)
- ☐ Organize work to reduce reaching, bending and squatting.
- ☐ Use an elevated work platform for high work. (See Figures 7 and 8)
- ☐ Remove obstacles that get in the way of work processes and work flow.

**Figure 5: DON'T DO. Figure 6: DO.** Unnatural or awkward postures include reaching, twisting, kneeling, bending and lowering and can affect your neck, shoulders, lower back, hips, knees and ankles. Do not place glassware and mugs on the bottom shelf. Place them in your power zone, between your hips and chest. Only put things on the bottom shelf that you need very infrequently.



**Figure 7: DON'T DO. Figure 8: DO.** Unnatural or awkward postures include reaching, twisting, carrying, lifting and lowering. These can hurt your neck, upper back, shoulders and torso. An elevated work platform for high work can be helpful. Also, organizing pots, pans and equipment in your power zone can reduce this hazard. Make sure you move boxes, equipment or furniture that gets in the way of doing your job safely.



## HAZARD #2: REPETITIVE MOTIONS

Repetitive motions can lead to injuries when a task forces you to do the same movements over and over again. To reduce this type of hazard, workers should:

- ☐ Develop a daily maintenance schedule for sharpening knives.
- ☐ Spread repetitive tasks out over the day and between workers.
- ☐ Change hands to spread out repetitive movement. See if you can use your right hand half of the time and the left hand the other half of the time.
- ☐ Take frequent rest breaks from the repetitive activity.

## HAZARD #3: STANDING IN THE SAME PLACE FOR A LONG TIME

Standing in the same place for a long time, increases strain on the muscles, tendons, ligaments and nerves in the lower back, hips, legs and feet.

### OWNERS AND MANAGERS IN A RESTAURANT SHOULD:

- ☐ Buy and install thick rubber mats to make standing more comfortable.
- ☐ Buy stools, or low small benches to allow workers to change their position and rest one leg and foot.
- ☐ Workers should take breaks from standing still by walking around to increase blood flow.

## HAZARD #4: HEAVY LOADS

Heavy loads, especially those that are unstable (for example, enclosed weight that moves, such as bottles of liquid) increase strain to neck, upper back, arms, lower back and pelvis. To reduce the hazard of very heavy and/or unsteady loads, there are many things owners, managers and workers of a restaurant can do.

### EQUIPMENT: IN THE KITCHEN, MANAGERS AND OWNERS OF RESTAURANTS SHOULD:

- ☐ Use dumbwaiters to transfer food products between floors.
- ☐ Buy well-designed hand or platform trucks, or carts to move food product in and trash out.
- ☐ Buy equipment to assist with pours (**See Figures 1 and 2**)
- ☐ Install handrails on stairs on both left and right sides.
- ☐ Install proper lighting: bright light in hallways and alleys, and on stairs.
- ☐ Buy service carts with wheels and comfortable handles to serve food. (**See Figures 9 and 10**)

### WORK PRACTICE: WORKERS IN THE KITCHEN SHOULD:

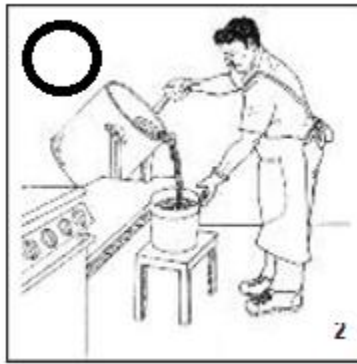
- ☐ Store heavy loads between hips and chest.
- ☐ Store much lighter loads between chest and shoulders.
- ☐ Organize work to reduce reaching, bending, pulling, pushing and squatting. (**See Figures 7 and 8**)
- ☐ Get help from coworkers when handling bulky or heavy loads. If the load feels too heavy for two

people then find a way to break up the load.

- ☐ Clear your walking path of objects and debris when handling heavy material.
- ☐ Make sure the walking path is not slippery.
- ☐ Bring the load you are carrying as close as possible to your body.
- ☐ Keep your head up and your torso (belly) straight.
- ☐ Turn with your feet; do not twist your torso (waist).
- ☐ Free your fingers and toes from underneath a box or load before placing it down.

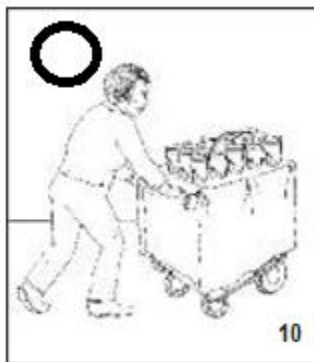
### **WORK PRACTICE: WORKERS IN THE FRONT OF THE HOUSE SHOULD:**

- ☐ Get help from co-workers when handling bulky or heavy food product and ice.
- ☐ Organize coworkers to serve ALL of the food to a table of customers at the same time. Use a group of servers to serve ALL of the appetizers at once, all of the drinks at once, and so on. Use several servers to clear the finished main course dishes from the table as well. This plan truly breaks up the load.



**Figure 1: DON'T DO. Figure 2: DO.** Heavy loads, especially unstable ones like liquid, can strain your neck, upper back, shoulders, arms, lower back and hips. To reduce this hazard, use equipment to assist with pours.





**Figure 9: DON'T DO. Figure 10: DO.** Heavy loads include lifting, lowering and carrying. Trays can be hard to carry and can often feel uncomfortable. Heavy loads, especially unstable ones, can increase strain in your neck, upper back, shoulders, arms, elbows, wrists and lower back. Properly maintained service carts that have large, comfortable handles and larger casters can almost completely eliminate this



**Figure 7: DON'T DO. Figure 8: DO.** Heavy loads can involve reaching, twisting, bending, pushing, pulling, carrying, lifting, and lowering. These can hurt your neck, upper back, shoulders, torso and lower back. Organizing pots, pans and trays in your power zone can reduce this hazard. If this is not possible, an elevated work platform for high work can be helpful. Make sure you move boxes, equipment or furniture that gets in the way of doing your job safely.

## HAZARD #5: FORCEFUL USE OF YOUR HAND MUSCLES

Forceful use of your hand muscles can result in injuries in back, shoulders, arms, wrists and fingers. There are many things owners, managers, and workers can do to reduce the force needed to do everyday tasks.

### ENGINEERING: MANAGERS AND OWNERS OF A RESTAURANT SHOULD:

- ☐ Buy or design oval or cylindrical handles on knives, spoons, ladles, and forks between about 1.25 and 2 inches in diameter. (See Figures 11, 12, 14, 15, and 16)
- ☐ Buy or design oval or cylindrical handles on knives, spoons, ladles, and forks, with handle lengths at least 5 inches. (See Figures 13 and 16)
- ☐ Buy large, rubber coated handles on knives, spoons, ladles, and forks to increase friction.
- ☐ Buy carts or hand trucks; buy lighter tools; buy tools that allow workers to keep their wrists straight.

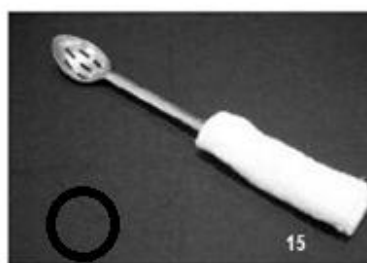
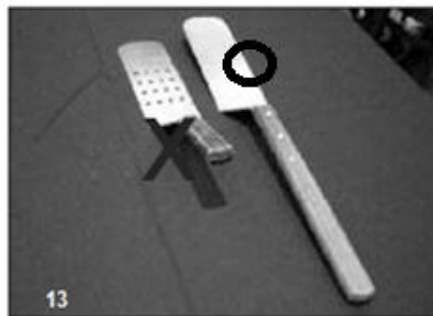


- ☐ Buy and attach handles to heavy objects that must be lifted.

## WORK PRACTICE: WORKERS SHOULD:

- ☐ Grip objects, tools, equipment and knives with the whole hand, not just a few fingers. Pick up smaller loads, keeping wrists straight.
- ☐ Keep a daily maintenance schedule and procedure for sharpening knives.
- ☐ Pick up items from the bottom, using the whole hand. Avoid using only a few fingers.
- ☐ Make the handles thicker on small tools; put tool down when not in use; attach handles to heavy objects that must be lifted. (See Figures 12, and 15, 16).

**Figure 13, Left DONT DO, Right DO. See Figure 16, Left: DONT DO, Right: DO.** Forceful use of your hand muscles can result in injuries to your shoulders, arms, wrists and fingers. Handles should be at least 5 inches long. Oval or cylindrical (round) handles are better. Plastic coated handles and thicker handles are easier to grip. Place the equipment down when not in use.



**Figure 11: DONT DO. Figure 12: DO. Figure 14 DONT DO. Figure 15: DO. Figure 16, Left DONT DO, Right: Do.** Forceful use of your hand muscles can result in injuries to your shoulders, arms, wrists and fingers. Pinching narrow and sharp edges with lots of weight at the end of the ladle can cause injuries. Plastic coated handles and thicker handles are easier to grip. Oval or cylindrical (round) handles are better. Place the equipment down when not in use.

## **HAZARD #6: SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS**

Injuries from slipping, tripping, and falling may be due to poor traction (low friction), bad lighting, inadequate handrails, oily and slippery floors, grease spills, and poor “housekeeping”.

### **EQUIPMENT: MANAGERS AND OWNERS OF THE RESTAURANT SHOULD:**

- ☐ Increase traction on stairways and walkways.
- ☐ Install handrails on both sides of stairways.
- ☐ Buy and install rubber mats.
- ☐ Buy slip-resistant shoes with low heels.
- ☐ Install bright lights on stairways and walkways.
- ☐ Replace worn-out, torn carpet and rugs; fix rough and uneven floor surfaces.
- ☐ Buy rolling ladders that have non skid bases.

### **WORK PRACTICE: WORKERS SHOULD:**

- ☐ Maintain a housekeeping schedule to keep walkways and surfaces clear
- ☐ Mop slippery, wet floors and spills right away.
- ☐ Keep floors and stairs clean and dry.
- ☐ Move slowly and carefully near corners and when handling objects, such as pots, pans, containers, vats, and food.
- ☐ Be aware of blind spots, rips in carpet or rugs, and rough and uneven floor surfaces. Make frequent requests to get these repaired.

## **HAZARD #7: BURNS**

To reduce burns from hot surfaces (grills, stoves), hot oil and grease, there are many things owners, managers and workers should do.

### **EQUIPMENT: MANAGERS AND OWNERS OF A RESTAURANT SHOULD:**

- ☐ Provide splashguards around hot surfaces **(See Figure 17)**
- ☐ Provide material handling devices, such as rolling carts with handles
- ☐ Maintain equipment in proper working order
- ☐ Make dry potholders and mitts readily available
- ☐ Provide pour assist devices. **(See Figures 1 and 2)**
- ☐ Ensure a burn first aid kit is available in the working area



**Figure 17: DO.** The device on top of the pan is called a splashguard. It is used to reduce grease burns from grills and stoves.



**Figure 1: DON'T DO. Figure 2: DO.** Burns can be caused from hot surfaces, such as grills, ovens, stoves, and hot liquid, oil and grease. To reduce this hazard, use equipment to assist with pours.

### **WORK PRACTICE: WORKERS SHOULD:**

- ☐ Dry food before placing in hot oil.
- ☐ Never leave hot oil unattended.
- ☐ Divide large vats of hot food into smaller batches before handling.
- ☐ Cool oil and grease before handling.
- ☐ Use lids and covers.
- ☐ Make sure that metal spoons are not left in pots and pans while cooking.
- ☐ Place food in basket, then slowly lower into hot oil; do not drop food into hot oil.
- ☐ Fill fryer baskets no more than half full.

- ☐ Gently raise and lower fryer baskets.
- ☐ Keep liquids away from fryers.
- ☐ Turn off stove when not in use.
- ☐ Keep pot and pan handles away from hot burners.
- ☐ Place food in boiling water slowly to reduce splash.
- ☐ Make sure pot handles do not stick out over the edge of a range or stove.
- ☐ Adjust burner flames to only cover the bottom of the pan.
- ☐ Use long oven gloves or mitts for deep ovens.
- ☐ Not open cookers and steam ovens when they are under pressure
- ☐ Open lids away from you
- ☐ Get help when handling a heavy container of hot liquid

### **HAZARD #8: CUTS AND LACERATIONS**

Cuts and lacerations can be caused by knives and unguarded machines. To reduce the risk of these types of injuries, there are several things managers, owners and workers can do.

#### **EQUIPMENT: MANAGERS AND OWNERS IN THE RESTAURANT SHOULD:**

- ☐ Make sure that machine guards are installed on all meat slicers, mixers, baking machines, and similar types of equipment.
- ☐ Maintain machinery to reduce chance of malfunction and accidents

#### **WORK PRACTICE: THINGS NEVER TO DO IN THE KITCHEN:**

- ☐ Never remove machine guards when in use.
- ☐ Never operate any machine unless you are trained in its use.
- ☐ Never cut meat in a slicer once it becomes too thin; use a knife to complete the cutting.
- ☐ Never wear jewelry or loose clothing, which can get stuck in a machine.
- ☐ ALWAYS tell management immediately if machine guards are missing, broken, or not working properly.



**Figure 18: DON'T DO. Figure 19: DO.** Cuts can be caused from not using the correct knife for a chosen task. For example, when cutting a lemon or lime, it is dangerous to use a large, long, wide knife on a small object. The worker has less control. It is safer to use a small paring knife when cutting small objects because the worker has more control over the knife

#### **ALL WORKERS SHOULD:**

- ☐ Unplug machines and equipment when not in use.
- ☐ Maintain machinery to reduce chance of malfunction and accidents.
- ☐ Cut and slice away from the body.
- ☐ Keep knives sharpened daily.
- ☐ Store knives properly in knife racks, not in metal or plastic containers.
- ☐ Not let knives soak in soapy or dirty water.
- ☐ Use the correct knife for the appropriate activity **(See Figures 18 and 19)**
- ☐ Use a damp cloth under cutting board to reduce movement of the board.
- ☐ Do not place knives near the edge of the countertop.
- ☐ Carry knives by the handle, with the cutting edge angled down and away from you.
- ☐ Never hand a knife to a coworker. Place it on a surface and let the coworker pick it up.
- ☐ Separate broken glass from trash.
- ☐ Use an ice scooper, not glassware.

### **HAZARD #9: CONTACT STRESS**

Contact stress or “mechanical stress” is caused by hard or sharp objects or edges pressing continuously against the body. The sides of the fingers, palms, wrists and forearms are more likely to get injured. Knees and elbows are also at risk of being hurt in the same way.

An example of contact stress in the hands is holding long metal kitchen utensil handles that are sharp, unpadded, and narrow. When these utensils contain a lot of weight or fluid (like a ladle) then the utensil can be heavy and require a lot of squeezing to keep steady.

An example of contact stress in the knees is kneeling on hard surfaces on one or both knees. For example, knee kneeling may occur when reaching into a low freezer for meat, while for other workers, this may occur when reaching for glassware on a very low shelf.

### EQUIPMENT: MANAGERS AND OWNERS IN THE RESTAURANT SHOULD:

- ☐ Provide well padded, large diameter handles without sharp edges that are between about 1.25 and 2 inches wide and between 5 and 15 inches long. The ladles at the end of the utensil should not hold excessive amount of fluid.
- ☐ Provide mats throughout the BOH that can serve as padding to reduce contact stress, leg and foot fatigue, and slipping from wet floors. Have small mats in front of FOH workstations.
- ☐ Provide a mat throughout the bar area.



**Figure 5: DON'T DO. Figure 6: DO.** Contact stress is caused from kneeling on hard floors. Reorganize the location of the glassware and mugs to eliminate kneeling. Do not place glassware and mugs on the bottom shelf. Place them in your "power zone," between your hips and chest. Only put things on the bottom shelf that you need very infrequently.

### WORK PRACTICE:

- ☐ If well padded, large diameter handles do not exist, the workers can wrap dish towels several times around the handles of utensils.
- ☐ Try to reorganize the task and location of supplies to eliminate kneeling.
- ☐ If mats are not found in the BOH and workers must kneel on the floor, try using a stack of towels or soft stacks of folded cardboard and kneel on these instead of the cement floor. Kneel preferably on only one knee.
- ☐ For FOH workers do not place cutlery, dishes, plates, or glassware on the bottom shelf. Place these objects in your "power zone," between your hips and chest. **(See Figures 5 and 6)**

## SECTION 5

### Our Rights on the Job

It is the employer's responsibility to make the workplace safe. Sometimes the employer tells employees that they get cut or burned because they are not careful, but most times it happens because of the conditions they work under.

There is a national government agency called OSHA, which stands for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Under the OSHA law, our employers have to provide us with safe working conditions. There is a standard that says that mats should be provided to prevent you from slipping on wet floors, or there should be a guard on a machine to prevent you from getting cut, or that we should be trained to work safely with chemicals.

We have many laws that help to protect us. There are even laws that say if you are under 18, there are certain jobs you can't do because they are too dangerous for teenagers."

#### Discussion Questions: Do You Know Your Rights on the Job?

- 1) *Who is responsible for providing you with a safe workplace?*
- 2) *What is workers' compensation, and who pays for it? Can any worker receive compensation if s/he is injured on the job?*
- 3) *What if my employer doesn't pay me overtime, and doesn't pay my co-worker minimum wage? Is there anyone I can call?*
- 4) *Is it illegal to discriminate against employees because of their race or ethnicity?*

---

### SECTION 5 SUMMARY:

As restaurant workers:

1. **You have the right to a safe and healthy workplace.** The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is the federal agency that enforces safety and health in the workplace. OSHA requires employers to provide a workplace free from recognized hazards that can cause death or physical harm to a worker.
2. **You have the right to file a worker compensation claim if you are injured on the job.** If you are injured at work, you have a right to file a worker compensation claim. Your employer is required by law to have worker compensation insurance. An employer should not pay for an employee's medical expenses, and your employer should not pressure you if you wish to file a claim.
3. **You have the right to be paid minimum wage.** For tipped employees, your hourly rate and tip credit combined must be at least equal to your state's minimum hourly wage. See "**Resources**" at the end of this booklet to get help with these issues.
4. **You have the right to be paid overtime whenever you work more than 40 hours in a week.** Your employer must pay 1 1/2 times the normal rate of pay for each additional hour. (Example: If an employee earns \$7.00 per hour, that employee must be paid \$10.50 an hour for those hours over 40 hours in the week worked.)



5. **You have the right to be given a 1/2 hour meal break when you work a daytime shift of more than 6 hours.** (Employees whose shift begins before 11:00 am and ends after 7:00 pm must also be given a 20-minute break between 5:00 pm and 7:00 pm.)
6. **You have the right to form or attempt to organize or form a union with other employees in a restaurant.** An employer may not retaliate against workers who try to come together with other workers on the job to address conditions in the workplace.
7. **You have protection against anti-discrimination under the law.** It is illegal for your employer to discriminate against you in hiring and firing, compensation, transfer, promotion, recruitment, getting fringe benefits, or other terms and conditions of employment. Harassment and retaliation for taking action against discrimination is also illegal. Employers must post notices about the Federal anti discrimination laws.
8. **If you are less than 18 years old, the laws regarding minors' employment apply to you.** Young workers are limited in the number of hours they can work, and in the type of work that they can do. You can't work in a restaurant if you are under 14 years old, and you cannot operate washing, slicing mixing or other high-risk machines if you are under 18 years old.

(From the Restaurant Owner Manual, NYC Department of Immigrant Affairs, 2006)



## SECTION 6

### Taking Action

Work with worker advocacy organizations to find successful ways to get your rights to decent pay and safer working conditions. When starting out, it is useful to work with people who have experienced similar problems. Their input can help you and your co-workers to be more successful in taking on these issues.

Many workers are worried that they will face termination from their job if they voice complaints or report bad working conditions. However, OSHA law *protects* workers who have experienced discrimination, job termination, or any other retaliation because they reported workplace safety concerns.

---

#### Discussion question:

*What actions/strategies do you think you and your co-workers could use to get your employer to change conditions in your restaurant?*

#### SECTION 6 SUMMARY:

##### Taking Action

It is your right to be safe on the job.

Know your rights on the job. You have the right to a safe and healthy workplace. Your employer is required by law to keep your workplace safe. You have rights that ensure that you are paid minimum wage and paid overtime. You have a right to worker compensation benefits if you are injured on the job.

- Remember that you are not alone – you can always do more by getting together with other workers. Join with other restaurant workers to work to change your working conditions. Your efforts will help EVERYONE who shares the same struggle for better workplaces.