

# Fires & Food Safety in a Food Service Operation

## Be Prepared

- Develop a plan for what to do in case of fire, including who should be called after hours?
- Maintain contact information for people that can help, including:
  - Local health department
  - Police department
  - Insurance company
  - Restoration company for water and fire damage
  - Utility companies (electric, gas, etc.)
  - Attorney

## Affected Operations

Customer and employee safety should be top priority. A fire of any size can temporarily cause unsafe food service conditions.

A non-reportable fire is any small confined fire in a food service that has been extinguished using a simple device, such as a wet towel or pan lid. All other fires must be reported to the regulatory authority.

A confined fire is a fire contained to a small incidental area or a single piece of equipment, the fire is extinguished using a simple fire-fighting device (i.e. hand-held extinguisher), and does not require extensive cleanup. Unaffected areas of the establishment *may* be able to remain open while clean-up and minor repairs are made.

Regardless of the size of the fire, operations should be discontinued if the process of fighting the fire contaminates food, equipment, utensils, linens, single service items, etc. Typically, these fires are associated with the use of high pressure fire suppression devices (e.g. ventilation hood fire suppression system or professional fire department equipment). Resume operations only after recovery steps have been completed.

Discontinue operations immediately if a fire causes extensive damage to equipment and/or the facility's structure. Resume operations only after recovery steps have been completed.

*A food establishment that was ordered or otherwise required to cease operations may not re-open until authorization has been granted by the regulatory authority.*

## Recovery

Recovery involves the following necessary steps for re-opening and returning to a normal and safe operation:

- Contact all appropriate agencies to determine if the building structure is safe and approved for occupancy.
- If the facility requires renovation or repairs due to fire damage, the plans may need to be reviewed and a reopening inspection be conducted by the regulatory authority.
- Sort the salvageable from the non-salvageable foods as quickly as possible. *See next page for additional guidance on salvaging.*
- Properly dispose of the non-salvageable food items.
- Complete general clean-up of the facility, and clean and sanitize equipment and utensils.
- Re-occupancy should be allowed only after the fire department has determined that the structure is safe.

## General Cleanup Considerations

- All areas affected by the fire must be cleaned and sanitized.
- All damaged food products, equipment, utensils, linens, and single service/use items must be removed from the premises as necessary:
- If food must be retained to receive credit from distributors, it must be stored separate from other food and clearly labeled as “NOT FOR SALE”.

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### Salvaging: General Considerations

If the quantities of food involved are large, it may be feasible to attempt to salvage the food for either human or animal consumption. The following is a guide for handling specific food items:

- **Bottled beverages:** Unless protected by a plastic outer wrap or in bottles with sealed screw-on lids, soft drinks in glass bottles are almost impossible to salvage. In addition, soft drinks in plastic bottles are almost always deemed unsalvageable due to heat and smoke.
- **Canned beverages:** May be salvaged if the contents have not been subjected to excessive heat or fire. The cans must be cleaned, if necessary. If the cans have been subjected to excessive heat or are deemed uncleanable, the contents must be destroyed.
- **Dairy products:** Dairy products should be destroyed with no attempt to salvage, due to vulnerable packaging and temperature requirements.
- **Sugars, candies, flour, cereal products, bakery products, dried beans, rice, and other grains:** No attempt to salvage such products should be permitted due to vulnerable packaging.
- **Products in glass with metal screw-type or metal slip covers:** This includes pickles, olives, catsup, steak sauces, salad dressings, syrups, etc. This type of container is impossible to clean or disinfect due to exposure of the threaded closure and must be destroyed.
- **Refrigerated and frozen food:** Usually no salvage can be attempted unless the foods are stored in a completely enclosed walk-in or cabinet refrigerator or freezer and electrical service has not been interrupted for extended periods. Prompt removal of such foods to a suitable storage unit is necessary to save the product.
- **Produce – fresh or dried:** Usually, no attempt to salvage can be permitted and all such products must be destroyed.
- **Canned goods:** Where the heat and water damage has been minimal, canned goods can be salvaged quickly by cleaning the exterior surfaces and removing them to suitable storage areas away from the fire scene.
- **Single service items:** The operator/regulator must consider soot residue, even on single service items that are still in plastic sleeves, due to static electricity and transfer. Some operators/regulators may think that the sleeves can be “wiped” off, and, because the items were wrapped, they should be okay for service, when in reality, they may not be okay.

### Disposal of Food

If it is determined that food must be discarded:

- The facility should document the type and amount of food, costs and the reason for disposal for insurance and regulatory purposes.
- Remove to a designated condemned food storage area away from food preparation and equipment storage in secured, covered refuse containers or other isolated areas to prevent either service to the public or accidental contamination of the facility and other food.
  - Small volumes of food to be discarded can be denatured with a cleaning product (such as bleach) and placed in a covered refuse bin outside the facility.
  - Large volumes of food should be stored in covered refuse containers in a secure location and disposed of by a refuse disposal company as soon as possible should also be denatured.