

## **Restaurant Owners Don't Have Money to Burn!**

Economists keep reminding us that we are living in lean and mean times. This is not news to restaurant owners, who have always operated within tight profit margins and have had to watch expenditures carefully.

One area of particular concern is the capital cost and preventative maintenance expenses of the kitchen exhaust system. Part of the problem is that owners and managers are being confronted with frustrating and conflicting information when it comes to fire suppression, water wash hood servicing and exhaust system cleaning.

At the center of this dilemma is a powerful revolution in both statutory changes (municipal by-laws and fire/building codes) and a growing awareness of the need for greater accountability on the part of service companies. Code bodies and especially the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) have come a long way in addressing some of these very serious concerns. For example, NFPA #96 (1-3.1.3) now requires that all areas of the exhaust system shall be accessible for inspection and cleaning. Additionally, they have created specific maintenance criteria and service frequency schedules to improve fire safety.

It is of note that hundreds of millions of dollars in losses take place every year due to restaurant fires in kitchen exhaust systems. So, the need to have these systems properly maintained is evident.

To this end, several North American jurisdictions have pressed for increased accountability on the part of various service personnel. For instance, the State of Florida, Nevada and the Province of British Columbia and others have adopted specific competencies as a requirement for these trades to do business in their areas.

Therefore, a number of questions need to be asked:

- What can restaurant owners do to save money while maintaining the performance and fire safety of their systems?
- How can restaurateurs sort through the rapid technological changes that are taking place within the kitchen exhaust systems themselves, as well as in fire suppression systems?
- How can restaurateurs equip themselves with the needed knowledge base so that they may be able to assess and evaluate the condition and service needs of their own systems?
- How can kitchen operators know they are obtaining competent, reputable companies to provide service?

Phil Ackland's Kitchen Exhaust Systems Manual - Inspectors Edition will help restaurant owners understand what to look for in a service provider, what the relevant codes are, as well as what Fire and Building Inspectors are looking for concerning Kitchen Exhaust.

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