

How To Minimize Restaurant Workers' Comp Claims



According to national industry safety data, the most common restaurant workers' compensation claims result from cuts and wounds, slips and falls, burns and overexertion injuries. Some of these are minor, but major injuries can cause partial or full disability for which your company will be liable.

It's incumbent upon restaurant owners and managers to implement solid safety protocols to protect both the business and its workers. This article can help get you started or serve as a springboard for a review of your current injury-prevention practices.

Safety tips for specific injury categories

Preventive measures and protocols can be developed for each of the most common areas of restaurant workplace injuries. We'll take a look at them by category.

Cuts and wounds — Lacerations, punctures and amputations are unfortunately common in restaurants. Along with knives and other slicing equipment and tools, objects such as broken glass or dishes are typical causes of injury.

- Train all staff, including those involved in food prep and cleaning, on knife safety.
- Keep knives sharpened and properly maintained for maximum safety.
- Properly store knives and other sharp implements. Magnetic wall strips or storage blocks are safer than drawers (and help keep the knives from banging around and getting dull, too).
- Keep sharp, pointed objects away from eye level. Anti-fog eye protection may also be a good idea.
- Dispose of broken glass separately from other trash to prevent accidental injury.
- Enforce use of proper personal protective equipment (PPE), including cutting gloves.
- Train employees on how to safely wash knives to avoid accidental cuts in sinks.
- Provide basic first-aid training for cuts.

Slips and falls — The National Safety Council reports that slips and falls are responsible for a significant number of restaurant injuries, both in the kitchen and elsewhere. Injuries due to slips and falls can result in substantial workers' compensation losses, especially when breaks, ligament tears, or head or back injuries are involved.

- Require all employees to wear slip-resistant footwear.
- Make use of properly placed slip-resistant floor mats. Replace them when they get worn.
- Consider finishing floor surfaces with non-slip materials recommended by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).
- Establish and enforce proper cleaning routines and make sure spills are cleaned up immediately and fully.
- Remove clutter from high-traffic areas.
- Take extra cleaning and safety precautions for grease spills.
- Train employees on how to safely use stools and ladders and enforce prevention measures for falls from heights.

Burns — National data indicates that more than one-third of workplace burn injuries occur in restaurants.

- Train employees on how to safely handle and carry hot trays, dishes and plates.
- Develop safety procedures for transporting and disposing of hot liquids, especially oil.
- Make sure stovetops are kept clean to avoid grease flare-ups.
- Follow manufacturers' instructions on safely operating grills, ovens and deep fryers, and train all employees on how to properly use such equipment.
- Provide PPE, such as gloves, gauntlets and safety shields, and enforce proper use whenever handling hot items.

Overexertion injuries — Muscle sprains, strains and other overexertion injuries are commonplace in restaurant occupations, in both the front of the house and the kitchen. Lifting, pulling, carrying, pushing or holding items improperly can lead to acute (sudden) or chronic (over time) injury.

- Provide employees with tools and equipment such as carts and dollies to move heavy objects or items.
- Train employees on how to safely lift objects to avoid injury.

- Implement safety procedures, such as having two employees move heavy objects together.
- Store heavy items at the proper height to avoid lift injuries.
- Make sure kitchens, pantries, refrigerators and freezers are properly organized to avoid lift injuries.

General restaurant safety measures

All restaurant management and staff, whether they work in the front of the house or in the kitchen, should be familiar with all safety protocols and procedures.

Employees should receive training, review written manuals and participate in presentations on safety at the beginning of their employment and periodically thereafter. Employees should also know when and how to use PPE. Periodic testing and retraining are part of an excellent safety program.

You should know and follow all safety guidelines established by local and state health officials, as well as OSHA. Routine inspections should be conducted in kitchens and dining rooms, and on all pieces of equipment.

You are required to supply PPE to all employees based on job duties and national and local standards and guidelines. Supervisors should enforce the use of PPE. Properly displaying OSHA workplace signage is also important. You could be fined for failing to do so.

There are many resources, some which are complimentary, that you can use to build out a safety program for your restaurant. Talk to your insurance professional about further resources already on hand.

The key to reducing the incidence and severity of injuries is being thorough in your risk management examination and follow-through, addressing the most severe and common risks first, and enforcing safety protocols at all times. A consistent commitment must come from the top. While many practices are inconvenient, emphasize to your workers that the benefits far outweigh the annoyance.

A culture and track record of safety is good for your employees, company morale and workers' compensation premiums — so make it a priority now and always.

Amber Rice-Manella

(610) 898-6510
amanella@galleninsurance.com

Gallen Insurance Inc

2237 Lancaster Pike
PO Box 100
Shillington, PA 19607
www.galleninsurance.com



Gallen Insurance has been providing complete business and personal insurance products and benefit services to residents of Berks County, the Greater Reading area and throughout Pennsylvania **since 1957**.

This content is for informational purposes only and not for the purpose of providing professional, financial, medical or legal advice. You should contact your licensed professional to obtain advice with respect to any particular issue or problem.

