Serve Yourself a Safe Workday

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Cooks and helpers are more likely to suffer burns than workers in other industries. The food service industry is not the most hazardous, but it does have its dangers.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Hazards include knives and broken glass, wet floors, cramped quarters, heavy machines and electrical and chemical issues. Food preparers lift heavy sacks and boxes, work near heat, and do a lot of cutting and dicing. Servers lift heavy trays and bins. As a result, any food service worker may experience shoulder, tendon or muscle injuries.

Whether you work in food service or just work in your own kitchen, be aware of the hazards.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Here are some food service safety tips, starting with a hot spot – the stove:

- Keep fire extinguishers handy. The K extinguisher is especially designed to put out fires involving vegetable oil. At home, a combination ABC extinguisher should be readily accessible in the kitchen.
- Never leave oil under heat unattended.
- Keep objects clear of hot oil.
- Slide a lid over a grease fire.
- Turn pan handles aside so they don't get bumped or snag on clothing, but keep them clear of other burners.
- Check electrical cords on deep-fat fryers to ensure they can't be snagged, overturning a fryer full of boiling oil. Never use a frayed cord.

- Never overfill a fryer with oil or food. Cool oil before moving it.
- When removing the cover from a boiling pot, expose the far side of the pot first, to release steam.
- Wear protective aprons and oven mitts when needed.
- When preparing food, organize what's needed so you don't have to reach. Store heavy and frequently-used items at waist height, not overhead.
- Whenever possible, use mechanical aids to chop, dice and mix.
- When cleaning kitchen floors, use grease-cutting products and wear slip-resistant shoes. When vacuuming or mopping, keep wrists flat and straight and "walk" with the mop or vacuum, instead of making your arm do all the work.
- Ventilate kitchens and de-grease exhaust hoods and ducts to prevent fires.

Here are some other food preparation tips:

- When standing, keep one knee bent to relieve pressure on your back. Don't bend over the sink.
- When unloading a dishwasher use your knees to bend and lift.

Serving tips:

- Don't lift heavy serving trays above shoulder height. With heavy items in the center, balance a tray on both your hand and arm and don't carry more than you can comfortably handle.
- Alternate hands when carrying trays.
- Avoid awkward postures. Ask customers to pass plates along.

FINAL WORD

A pre worker and helper in the kitchen of a busy restaurant does the "heavy lifting." Make sure you stay aware of all the dangers and hazards associated with food service safety.