

The Future of Commercial Kitchen Exhaust Cleaning

Over the next five years, the image of kitchen exhaust cleaning is going to change dramatically. What follows is just the beginning.

As most involved exhaust cleaners are aware, in 1998 the NFPA 96 adopted the standard that commercial exhaust systems be inspected and cleaned by trained, qualified and certified (TQC) companies or persons - who are *acceptable to the authority having jurisdiction*. The authority having jurisdiction or AHJ includes plan examiners, building and field inspectors, mechanical inspectors, fire department officials and environmental health department officials.

In the 2004 NFPA 96 Standard, the definitions of what trained, qualified, and certified mean were further refined and explained.

Certified: A formally stated recognition, and approval of an acceptable level of competency, acceptable to the AHJ.

Qualified: A competent and capable person or company that has met the requirements and training for a given field acceptable to the AHJ.

Trained: A person who has become proficient in performing a skill reliably and safely through instruction and practice/field experience acceptable to the AHJ.

With the responsibility of what is "Acceptable" squarely resting with the authority having jurisdiction; these AHJ officials are now searching for knowledge to fulfill their mandate.

In the fall of 2002, the first *Inspecting Kitchen Exhaust Systems Seminar* was offered. This seminar informs fire, building and insurance officials on how to inspect the installation, and maintenance of exhaust and suppression systems. It also promotes the need for exhaust cleaners to fulfill the three TQC requirements defined above.

This ISO 9001 Certified seminar is being recognized by governments at every level throughout the US and Canada. The *Inspectors manual* used in the seminars is referenced in the NFPA 96.

As a result of this seminar, fire departments are creating checklists and databases to systematically inspect restaurants. They are also developing public education programs for their local restaurants and cleaners. In the future if an exhaust system cannot be entirely cleaned, it must be reported, in writing. The Crew Leaders or Managers On Duty (MOD), not just owners, must have the knowledge to recognize and report serious non-compliant situations in the exhaust system. Often grease removal is limited to readily visible areas in and around the hood and filters by poorly trained duct cleaners. The plenum and ducts may go untouched.

Restaurant chains are also seeing the benefit of these inspection seminars, and the necessity of using trained and certified exhaust cleaners. The restaurant industry's expectation levels are becoming increasingly demanding.

For the first time, the Province of Alberta, Canada, has formally recognized the NFPA requirements for exhaust cleaners and the responsibility of those who inspect. A local group of exhaust cleaners, fire departments and the provincial code-making body have created a mechanism that will provide these requirements. An association was formed and recognized by the Province to administer these requirements. This is the first jurisdiction to reach this level of oversight; it will not be the last.

Finally and most powerfully, the *Fire Investigation in Kitchen Systems Manual* (to be published in the summer of 2005) will enlighten the insurance and legal professions. This manual documents the responsibilities of restaurants, installers and service-providers of fire suppression and exhaust systems. It details points for investigators and attorneys to look for, and questions to ask.

Over the next five years, accountability is going to become the key issue in servicing commercial kitchen systems. If a restaurant, installer or service-provider chooses to play fast-and-loose with fire safety, they can no longer avoid the consequences.

About the author: Phil Ackland has been in the commercial kitchen field for nearly 40 years. He is a member of the NFPA 96 Committee. He has written a number of books on the subjects of Installing, Inspecting and Servicing commercial kitchen exhaust systems (two are referenced in the 2004 NFPA#96). His company is ISO 2001 Certified. He offers training and certification to cleaners, Fire and Building Officials and the insurance profession. He assists fire investigators and attorney with kitchen system related insurance liability claims.

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