



Restaurant Design Requirements for Health Department Approvals

Of the many dining concepts in business and currently being developed, a common denominator is that all restaurant facilities should be a safe location for patrons and employees. From an environmental health stand point, there are certain requirements that all restaurants need to adhere to. Most of these requirements mentioned here are regarding kitchen layout and equipment and would be further outlined within local building and health department requirements.

The design of a commercial kitchen does have a direct impact on the health and safety of the public. Restaurants need to meet at least the minimum environmental health requirements in order to operate. A great deal of requirements should be identified early in the design phase. If environmental health items are addressed as they arise, they can become time consuming and costly.

I would like to touch on some noteworthy items that all restaurants should adhere to. If your upcoming restaurant will meet these requirements, then you can rest assure a grand opening is within reach! Please note that these are basic requirements and should apply to most cases, it is best to consult with building code and health department officials within your jurisdiction for specific information.

Sinks

Sinks are major components for restaurants. Certain sinks will be dedicated towards utensil cleaning, food preparations and hand washing. A one or two compartment sink with an attached drain board will be required to clean meats and produces. Two separate sinks for meat and produce will work great and in some cases a requirement. But if space is a concern, you should consult with the local health department to see if your kitchen can do with a single meat and produce sink. A three compartment sink with attached drain boards on both sides will be needed for cleaning pots, pans and utensils. The three compartment sink cannot be used for food cleaning.

A restaurant will likely need two or more hand sinks. Strategically locating the hand sinks within the service area will limit travel distances for employees. Hands sinks should be placed so that they are approximately 15 feet maximum walking distance from any service area.

A single mop sink is generally sufficient. This sink's sole purpose is for the coveted job of mopping! Most mop sinks will be floor based with hot and cold domestic water supplying it. The area adjacent to the sink will have mops, buckets and cleaning agents close at hand.

Automatic Dish Washers

Although not specifically required by health departments, automatic dish washer machines are used in most restaurant locations and are better than manual cleansing for pots, utensils, cutlery, etc. Machines have short running cycles, efficient and economical. Dishwashers can also utilize extremely high temperatures for better hygiene and sanitation.

Refrigeration

Refrigeration equipment is a necessity for all restaurants. There are many options to suit any restaurant's needs. Health departments will be mainly concerned that there is a minimum of one freezer and one refrigerator. It is my belief that restaurants benefit with at least one walk-in freezer. (And possibly a walk-in refrigerator if the budget permits) Restaurants can reduce food costs by storing larger amounts of food with longer shelf life.

Exhaust Hood

An exhaust hood is the piece of equipment above the cooking line which contains fans, filters, and other components. The hood is used to remove airborne grease, combustion products, smoke, odors, heat, and steam from the air by a combination of filtration and evacuation of the air. Most jurisdictions will require that exhaust hoods be fitted with a fire suppression system. Even though the hoods can be intricate, large and one of the more costly pieces of restaurant equipment, it will be essential.

Restrooms

Restroom facilities are an essential part of any restaurant establishment. If the restaurant is strictly a take-out establishment, then only an employee restroom would be sufficient. If a restaurant has any type of dining in, restrooms will need to be accessible to employees and patrons. The amount of restrooms is determined on the total occupancy count of the restaurant. The restroom fixture count is divided into male and female restrooms. (Unisex bathrooms typically do not fly nowadays) Also note that there will be handicap accessible requirements with the restrooms. (As well as with the entire restaurant) Soap, means of hand drying and trash receptacles are also required.

Interior Finishes

Health departments are also concerned about the interior finishes in the restaurant's service area. Kitchen flooring will need to be non-porous and be easily cleaned. Quarry or ceramic tile will work great in the floor and cove base areas. The walls need to be "washable". A glossy paint on drywall may work, but plastic wall panels or glazed ceramic tile would be more ideal. Behind the cooking line it is best to have a stainless steel panel on the walls to resist grease. The ceilings should also be "washable" above all kitchens areas. Acoustical ceiling tiles will not work in commercial kitchens because of their porous quality and do not hold up well in wet areas. Typically drywall with a gloss paint finish or special ceiling tiles will be acceptable. All ceiling mounted lights must have a protective shield on them in the event a bulb breaks, the glass will not appear in the soup.

Grease Traps

Grease Traps or Grease Interceptors are plumbing devices used to catch kitchen greases and solids before they enter the municipal wastewater system. Most municipalities require them for any type of restaurant establishment because fats and oils become problematic to the municipal treatment facility. There are two major types of grease traps used today. The first one is an interior application that sits adjacent to the sink or sinks and has a capacity of about 50 gallons. The second type is an exterior grease trap made of concrete and concealed underground with an approximate capacity of 1500 lbs. Many jurisdictions are now requiring that a minimum grease trap to be at the 1500 lbs. capacity regardless of restaurant size. Grease traps can be a relatively costly item, so it is good to find out early what the local requirements governing them are going to be.

Every successful restaurant should begin with its menu. The restaurant is in fact an extension of the cuisine being served. Even with increasing environmental health regulations for commercial kitchens, restaurateurs still has the freedom to incorporate any piece of cooking equipment to suite his or her needs provided they meet certain standards. Good health and safety practices during the design phase will surely make your next restaurant concept a reality.

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