

Restaurant fire risks: Not just for kitchens



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While it's true that most restaurant fires start (and end, fortunately) in the kitchen, those that originate outside the kitchen can sometimes be more damaging and costly. According to the National Fire Data Center (NFDC), restaurant fires in the U.S. cost an estimated USD165 million each year. Not surprisingly, cooking equipment accounts for 61 percent of restaurant fires. But the other causes of fire actually add up to more in direct property damage (see chart).

The biggest driver of property damage cost is whether or not the fire is confined. Over 90 percent of kitchen fires stay confined and end up costing on average USD840, but unconfined fires cost nearly USD60,000 on average.¹ You can see why preventing fires outside the kitchen—where you're less likely to catch them and extinguish them quickly—is a good way to reduce your risk of a fire that could devastate your business. Keep in mind that fires not only damage your property, but can cause injuries to employees and guests, compounding your property loss with liability and workers' compensation losses.

Electrical fires spark costly losses

Electrical fires are the second leading cause of fires in the restaurant industry overall, and the leading cause of larger, nonconfined restaurant building fires. They can often be prevented with some routine maintenance and employee training. Some common causes of electrical fires in restaurants include extension cord use, overloading electrical systems with too much equipment, storing combustible materials too close to an electrical panel, and foreign materials near lighting units: Some steps you can take to prevent electrical fires include.²

- If you don't already have one, start a regular maintenance and inspection program.
- Train your staff to identify hazards, such as locating breaker switches, identifying unsafe electrical cords and how to report hazards.
- Hire only qualified contractors that are properly licensed to perform electrical work.



Mulch: A restaurant's growing fire menace

A quick Google® search on restaurant mulch fires brings up a long list of incidents all over the country. A large chain restaurant in Cherry Hill, NJ was demolished along with a neighboring restaurant when a lit cigarette was tossed into a mulch pile.³ The fire smoldered until after closing time, and by the time the fire department was able to extinguish it, substantial damage had been done to both buildings.

With smokers forced outside in virtually every state due to smoking laws in public places, guests and employees tend to congregate in areas around the restaurant where there's shrubbery and mulch. These fires can smolder for hours because the smoldering "tunnels" under the surface then breaks out into open flame. Naturally, mulch fires are more common in hot, dry weather.

Here are some tips to help prevent mulch fires:

- Keep mulch at least 18 inches away from combustible building materials, such as wood, vinyl siding and decks.
- Provide proper receptacles (such as "butt outs") for smoking materials at all entrances and in designated smoking areas. Place them at least 18 inches from the building, and do not mulch in these areas. Empty receptacles regularly.
- Keep mulch beds moist when possible.⁴

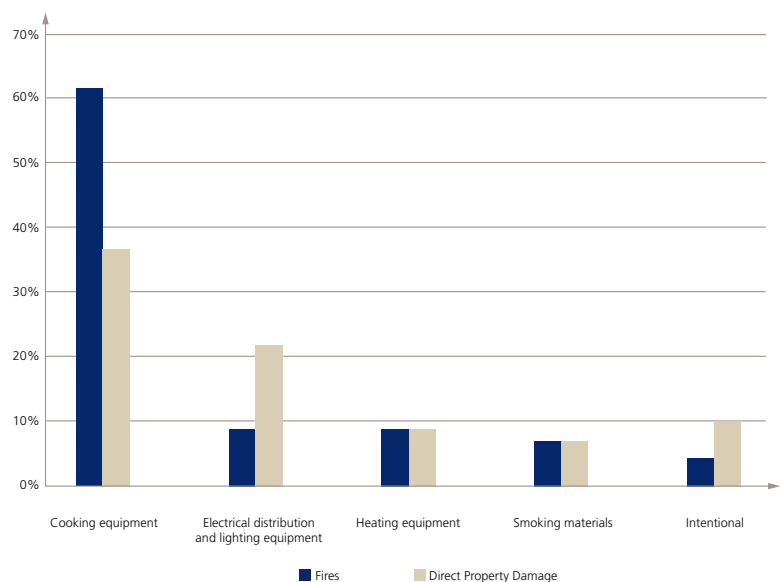
When fires are no accident

Restaurants fall victim to arson often enough where it's worthwhile to take some precautions. Plus, intentional fires are disproportionately high in direct property damage. Preventing intentional fires is similar to preventing burglaries in terms of actions and equipment, but with extra attention paid to areas outside your restaurant. In addition to having a quality burglar and fire alarm system, take these precautions in exterior locations:⁵

- Outer fences, walls and gates should be high and strong.
- Gaps under doors should be as small as possible.
- Don't keep stored materials stacked outside.
- Ensure that outside lights are turned on and illuminate properly.
- Keep dumpsters padlocked with a high-quality lock.
- Ensure that all flammable materials are stored in a secure area.

With fires so much more prevalent in the kitchen, it's easy to forget the other fire risks that exist both inside and outside your restaurant. But staying diligent will help protect not only your business, but your guests and employees as well.

Structure Fires in Eating and Dining Establishments by Major Cause 2010-2014. (Top 5 Shown)



Source: "Structure Fires in Eating and Drinking Establishments" National Fire Protection Association, February 2017.

1. Campbell, Richard. "Structure Fires in Eating and Drinking Establishments." National Fire Prevention Association Research. February 2017
2. Webster, Adam. "3 Ways to Protect Your Restaurant from Common Electrical Hazards." FSR Magazine. August 2016
3. The Philadelphia Inquirer. "Lit cigarette is cause of fire at Cherry Hill eateries." March 6, 2007
4. "Fire Factors" Fact Sheet. Office of the State Fire Marshal. www.mass.gov/dfs

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