

Kitchen Machine Safety

Do you work in a kitchen? You have the potential for some of the most serious and frequent accidents caused by improper use of kitchen machines, which are more powerful than types used in the home. One hasty shortcut can mean the loss of a finger or a hand. As in all industries, new employees are especially prone to accidents and should be trained to remember the following safety rules:

Cutters & Choppers: These should never be operated with the blades exposed--guards must always be in place. Every day, test the safety interlock switch that turns the power off when the cover is raised. Use only plastic spatulas to feed or remove food from the cutter. Never attempt to clean the machine unless the power switch is off and the cord is removed from the outlet. Machines have an uncanny way of turning on "accidentally" while being cleaned.

Slicers: Do not hand-feed slicers. Use the food conveyor attachment and keep your hands away from the blade at all times--especially when catching products being sliced. For cleaning, disconnect the power, set the slicing dial to zero, and *then* remove the guard. Use a spoon with a cloth wrapped around one end to clean the blade, working from the center to the outside. Ideally, wear metal mesh or Kevlar gloves when cleaning the blade. If these aren't available, cover the blade edge with a *thick* cloth while you rotate it, to protect your bare hand.

Grinders: Never remove or modify the guards, or use your hands to feed the grinder. Use only the specially designed metal or plastic stomper to prevent damaging the feed screw. Before attempting to clean or adjust anything on the equipment, turn off the power switch and disconnect the power cord.

Mixers: Since most mixer blades cannot be completely guarded, avoid loose-fitting shirt sleeves, ties or anything that could become caught in the agitator. Never try to wipe the sides of the bowl, adjust the machine, or remove the bowl while the machine is operating. When cleaning, turn off the power and disconnect the cord to prevent accidental operation.

Band Saws: Cutting frozen meat with a band saw can be extremely dangerous. Guards should be adjusted to expose *only as much blade as is absolutely necessary*. Never take your eyes off the blade when cutting and remember that the blade may "coast" for a while after the power is shut off. Disconnect the power when guards are removed for cleaning.

If any of these safety practices seem unnecessary or "overkill," remember this: Almost half of all accidents in the food service industry are caused by improper operation of kitchen machines.

