



Health and safety for waiting staff

Catering Information Sheet No 20

Introduction

This information sheet gives employers practical advice on how to reduce health and safety risks associated with waiting work. It summarises employers' responsibilities and provides a checklist for employers and staff themselves.

Many injuries in a restaurant or dining area can be avoided by following a few simple procedures.

The main risks of injury to waiting staff are slips and trips, cuts, burns and injuries from lifting heavy or awkward loads.

If you employ agency staff you must provide the agency with information on risks to their employees and the precautions applying to them.

Employer's responsibilities

You must:

- ensure the health and safety of your employees and those (such as contractors and customers) who might be affected by your activities;
- carry out a risk assessment to identify any risks and put procedures in place to control and monitor risks;
- discuss health and safety with your employees or their appointed representative;
- provide adequate facilities for staff including, if necessary, uniforms and personal protective equipment (PPE);
- provide adequate first-aid facilities;
- provide relevant induction and training and information on risks to all your staff including any agency or temporary workers;
- ensure that there are adequate and experienced staff to supervise operations; and
- set up emergency procedures (eg for fire or accident).

Temporary or agency staff

It is important that both temporary and permanent waiting staff are fully briefed on workplace health and

safety risks and the steps being taken to control them. Such staff may be unfamiliar with the workplace and may also have had little or no training in health and safety.

One-off venues or events

It is particularly important that risk assessments are carried out, not only for permanent work premises but also for any temporary venues. You should establish in advance if there are any potential risks at the site of the event. This can be done, for example, by inspecting the venue beforehand. This will allow you to prepare control measures before the event takes place.

You should ensure that all venues meet health and safety requirements, for example adequate lighting in marquees, sufficient space for staff and customers to move between tables, and safe electrical equipment.

Waiting staff checklist

The following list of simple measures can be used by managers as a checklist to brief staff, or by staff themselves as a reminder of good practice.

Site layout

Alert staff to specific hazards in the premises such as:

- low ceilings and door lintels, uneven flooring or ground;
- ramps and slopes (help may be needed if pushing heavy trolleys on these).

Cleaning restaurant equipment

Silverware

- Always wear gloves when using any silver dip or other cleaning agents.
- Always follow manufacturer's or supplier's instructions.

Knives

- Kitchen and cutlery knives are a risk when left in water-filled sinks and other containers.
- Wipe knives on the blunt side, with the blade facing away from you.

- When carrying by hand, point knifeblade downwards.

Glassware

- When polishing glasses, handle rims with care.
- Handle chilled glasses with care; glass is more fragile when cold.

Crockery and service dishes

- Do not stack too high; the weight can easily overload shelving and the pile of crockery may fall over.
- Do not overstock service stations (eg dumb waiters); the weight can overload shelves and drawers.
- Open cutlery drawers slowly (particularly if full).

Laying up

Always check that tables are secure and have been put up safely before any equipment or food is placed upon them.

Cutlery

- Use containers/cutlery baskets to carry cutlery.
- Store cutlery in baskets, handle uppermost.
- Take care to handle knives by the handle only.

Glassware

- When laying up for large numbers, use purpose-designed baskets or trays to carry glasses.
- Pick glasses up by the foot or stem.
- Do not bang the glassware together as this weakens the glass internally.

Carrying trays and lifting loads

- Distribute crockery and cutlery evenly on trays.
- Carry only the weight that feels safe and comfortable.
- Ask the supervisor for help in moving heavy or awkward loads.
- Know where the load is to go to before moving it.
- Ensure route is clear before setting off.

Coffee machines

- Only operate when fully trained.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions to fill and operate both small- and high-volume coffee machines.

Flammable and potentially explosive materials (eg methylated spirits, gas cylinders, aerosols, indoor fireworks, matches)

- Only handle when fully trained.
- Store stocks away from heat and direct sunlight.
- Follow manufacturer's or supplier's instructions when filling equipment with spirits or replacing gas cylinders, including what to do if they start leaking.
- Use matches and tapers when lighting candles and heaters.
- Position candles and burners well away from table decorations, curtains, fabrics and bar spirits.

Staff dress

Footwear

- Wear stable, properly fitting footwear to reduce the risk of slips, trips and falls.
- Footwear that covers the foot will delay heat penetration onto feet from spilt hot liquids.

Clothing

- Do not wear long, trailing skirts as they increase the risk of trips.
- Do not wear loose, long sleeves as they can catch on door handles and the backs of customers' chairs or catch fire from candles.

Hair

- Tie long hair back or pin it up at all times to prevent it:
 - coming into contact with naked flames (eg flambé work, candles and indoor fireworks); or
 - becoming caught on items of jewellery when serving guests or caught on backs of chairs; or
 - becoming caught when passing through plastic door curtains.

Food and drink service

Swing doors

- Ensure you are aware of entry and exit routes if double swing doors are in operation or, if there are no swing doors, be aware that there may be different entry or exit routes to the service/kitchen area.
- Go through these type of doors sideways or backwards so that the body (and not the tray) pushes.
- If there is a single exit/entry swing door, if possible check that no-one else is coming the other way; otherwise approach with caution.

Carrying trays or platters

- Ensure that load is secure and comfortable to carry.
- Distribute items evenly on the tray.
- Place hot foods and liquids in the centre of trays to ensure spillages will fall onto the tray and not over you, other staff, customers, or on the floor.

Carrying liquids

- Do not overfill containers (eg soup tureens, pots of coffee or tea).

Carrying hot dishes or plates

- Use a dry, thick, clean cloth (wet cloths transfer heat quicker and increase risk of burns).
- Warn customers (especially children) if plates, soup bowls or pre-filled mugs and cups are hot.
- Pay particular attention if carrying hot dishes or plates up stairs.

Sparkling wine

- After removing foil, keep pressure on cork with cloth-end or thumb, while removing wire clip.
- Then cover with cloth and ease out slowly (to control release of pressure from the bottle) by turning the bottle not the cork.

Dumb waiters

- Only use after instruction by supervisor/manager.
- Never override interlocks.

Customers

- Be aware that customers (particularly children) may move suddenly or move their chair back just as their meal is being served.
- If space is tight when serving, ask the customer politely if they can move to one side.
- If silver-serving, make sure hot surfaces do not touch customers.
- Watch out for handbags, briefcases and coats lying on the floor.
- Know what action to take if dealing with any customer who is drunk or aggressive.

Spillages

- Clean immediately if there is a risk of slipping during service, or close the area off until it is cleaned.

Clearing away from the table

- Never use a broken tray.
- Ensure the tray is stable and held securely before loading heavy items (place these at the centre of the tray).
- Do not overload trays; ensure weight of items is evenly spread across the tray.
- Use trays which allow the arms/hands to be held more or less in line with the shoulders.
- Hold the tray with both hands, especially if it is heavy or fully loaded.
- Only carry the weight that feels safe and comfortable, four covers alone of main-course dirty crockery, cutlery and tray can weigh 7 kg.
- Stack plates of the same size together.
- Never stack cups more than two-high.
- Place similar cutlery together on the tray (to avoid risk of cuts when sorting prior to washing).
- Use a separate tray to clear glasses.
- When clearing without a tray, stack crockery on arm in balanced layers, positioning cutlery securely.
- Do not load up more than can be carried securely or comfortably.

- When removing rubbish, check that cigarettes and cigars are out and disposed of in separate metal bin with no paper.
- Dispose of any broken glass or crockery in a separate designated container, taking care while handling.

End of service

- Flambé lamps must be turned off when not in use.
- Make sure that candles are snuffed out.
- Check area for discarded cigarettes.
- Switch off electrical equipment.
- Do not stack chairs and tables above chest height.
- Do not stack furniture on fire escape routes, in corridors or behind doors.

Emergencies

- Know what to do in the event of an accident, fire or other emergency.

Further reading

Slips and trips: Summary guidance for the catering industry Catering Information Sheet CAIS6 HSE Books 1996

An index of health and safety guidance in the catering industry Catering Information Sheet CAIS7(rev1) HSE Books 2000

The main health and safety law applicable to catering Catering Information Sheet CAIS11 HSE Books 2000

Manual handling in the catering industry Catering Information Sheet CAIS13 HSE Books 2000

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the references listed in this publication, their future availability cannot be guaranteed.

Further information

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