

NO. 12-24-OR

ORDINANCE

An ordinance of the County of Allegheny, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, providing for distribution of fire safety information by the Allegheny County Health Department to restaurant owners in the course of regular restaurant inspections.

Whereas, the process of preparing food inherently entails risk, perhaps most notably including fires, as even the cleanest, most well-ordered kitchens have equipment like deep fryers, stoves with open flames, charcoal ovens, electrical panels, greasy rags, and exhaust ducts, all of which can start a kitchen fire if proper precautions are not taken.; and

Whereas, a significant number of restaurant fires involve cooking equipment, and no amount of cooking experience can completely rule out kitchen fires in a situation where oils can come into contact with open flames at high temperatures; and

Whereas, grease vapors also are created in the process of cooking, and these vapors can accumulate on duct hoods and filters; while grease cannot be avoided in commercial kitchens, addressing grease build-up at regular intervals can decrease the risk of this build-up catching fire; and

Whereas, the risks of cooking with solid fuel like wood are perhaps less obvious, but still pose significant hazards; solid fuels require special attention and maintenance to make sure restaurant kitchens are safe, because cooking with wood releases a chemical called creosote in its vapor form, and this vapor also condenses as a liquid when it cools and can build up an extremely flammable layer when it combines with grease inside exhaust hoods or in other areas; and

Whereas, spontaneous combustion is much more common than many individuals may realize, and poses a significant risk in commercial kitchens; if oily towels, greasy rags, or paper products saturated in grease reach high enough temperatures they can ignite and burn rapidly. If grease saturated items accumulate in laundry or trash awaiting pickup, the grease or oil oxidizes which causes a rise in temperature and risk of fire; and

Whereas, the oxidization/heating process is exacerbated if linens are kept in a plastic bin instead of a laundry bag, and if either linens or waste bags are left in a hot location in the kitchen or outdoors. Proper ventilation for dirty linens and careful disposal of kitchen waste can reduce the risk of spontaneous combustion; and

Whereas, even freshly laundered rags and linens pose a risk of spontaneous combustion, insofar as cleaning methods may not remove 100% of the oil content in an item, and it therefore gradually builds over repeated use and laundering over time; and

Whereas, kitchen oil manufacturers generally regard the risk as significant enough to merit spontaneous combustion warning labels on their products, it is often recommended that storage and disposal of oil saturated items take place outdoors when possible and away from other combustible materials, and a number of companies specifically market containers designed to reduce the risk of spontaneous combustion and/or improve containment of such fires, if they break out; and

Whereas, the Allegheny County Fire Marshal recently estimated that spontaneous fires attributable to grease-saturated linens and rags occur approximately twice a month in the County; and

Whereas, electrical failure and malfunctions often can cause fires in a restaurant setting. Electrical fires are especially hazardous because the electricity creates a constant source of ignition for the flames, and because most restaurant kitchen equipment relies on electricity in some way, regular electrical inspections are crucial for fire prevention; and

Whereas, as noted by the National Restaurant Association, “[r]estaurant fires account for about 6% of all nonresidential building fires reported to fire departments each year, causing more than \$100 million in property damage, according to the U.S. Fire Administration.”; and

Whereas, restaurant fires also pose significant dangers to individuals, as they are most likely to occur when guests are in the restaurant dining and the kitchen is busy preparing their meals; and

Whereas, because restaurants are often located in populous areas and frequently are within the same buildings as other businesses or apartments/other private residences, restaurant fires also pose a danger to surrounding structures and other property; and

Whereas, it is therefore the judgment of Council that the Allegheny County Health Department should disseminate information on fire safety to all restaurant owners in the course of regular restaurant inspections;

The Council of the County of Allegheny hereby enacts as follows:

SECTION 1. Incorporation of the Preamble

The provisions of the preamble to this Ordinance are hereby incorporated in their entirety by reference herein.

SECTION 2. Development and Distribution of Materials

- A. No later than ninety (90) days after the date of final passage of this ordinance, the Allegheny County Health Department shall, in cooperation with staff at the Allegheny County Fire Academy, develop an informational packet regarding fire safety in the restaurant context. Such Packet shall address items including, but not limited to, cooking device safety, mitigation of grease and creosote accumulation, electrical equipment safety, and spontaneous combustion risk mitigation.

- B. Upon completion of the materials required under the terms of Subsection A, Allegheny County Health Department inspectors shall distribute copies of the packet to the owner and/or managers of each restaurant at which they conduct any type of inspection. The materials shall also be conspicuously posted on the Allegheny County Health Department's website.

SECTION 3. Severability. If any provision of this Ordinance shall be determined to be unlawful, invalid, void or unenforceable, then that provision shall be considered severable from the remaining provisions of this Ordinance which shall be in full force and effect.


SECTION 4. Repealer. Any Resolution or Ordinance or part thereof conflicting with the provisions of this Ordinance is hereby repealed so far as the same affects this Ordinance.

PRIMARY SPONSOR: COUNCIL MEMBER FUTULES

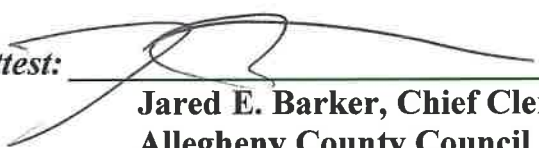
CO-SPONSORS: COUNCIL MEMBERS DeMARCO, HALLAM, GRZYBEK, MACEY, BETKOWSKI, NACCARATI-CHAPKIS, PALMOSINA and FILIAGGI and PRESIDENT CATENA

Enacted in Council, this 24th day of September, 2024,

Council Agenda No. 13157-24




Patrick Catena
President of Council

Attest: 

Jared E. Barker, Chief Clerk
Allegheny County Council

Chief Executive Office _____, 2024

Approved: 

Sara Innamorato
Chief Executive

Attest: 