

Restaurant Systems: Keeping Them Operational

Your customer expects their restaurant system to work automatically when there is a fire. This will happen if the system is installed correctly and it is kept operational. In order to keep the system operational, you need to perform the periodic maintenance, including inspections, testing, and replacement of critical parts, as required by code. Here is what you need to know to keep your customer's restaurant cooking areas safe.

Periodic Fusible Link Replacement

The system is designed to work automatically and extinguish a fire in the cooking appliances, hoods, and ductwork, if the fusible links are operational. But over time, grease accumulates on the surface of fusible links. They will not work if they are insulated from the heat of a fire. Many devastating restaurant fires are the result of heavily contaminated fusible links. That is the reason that the NFPA code requires fusible links to be replaced at least every 6 months [96, 12.2.4]. You should consider more frequent replacement than semi-annually, where significant grease vapor is produced during cooking (e.g. most foods fried).

Semi-Annual Maintenance

System maintenance is required to be performed at 6-month intervals [96, 12.2.1]. The work includes not only replacing links but actions that help ensure the system operates as intended. That includes visual inspections and operational testing of both automatic and manual operation of systems [96, 12.2.2]. Testing never includes discharging extinguishing agent through the piping network, so following the manufacturer's manual prevents this from happening. Cutting a fusible link or test link allows you to check the automatic operation of the system (make sure to take steps to prevent actual discharge). The gas or electricity for heating the cooking appliances automatically shuts off, so you will be checking that this happens simultaneously with system operation. You will also be operating the pull stations to ensure the system operates and cooking appliances shut off simultaneously.

Inspection Tag Sign Off

The year of manufacture and date of installation of fusible links is recorded on the inspection tag [96, 12.2.5]. Remember, the date the fusible link was manufactured does not limit when it can be used [96, A.12.2.4]. Link replacement is only dependent on when the link is installed. You initial and date the tag once all fusible links are replaced, visual inspections have been completed, and all operational testing has been performed in accordance with the manufacturer's manual and the code requirement.

Operational Instructions

Instructions are required to be provided to kitchen staff annually on proper use of extinguishers and manual actuation of the system [96, 12.1.4]. You should consider offering this type of instruction to the restaurant manager, so that he or she can pass along the knowledge to employees. Managers often appreciate, and are grateful, for the time you take to provide this valued information during your service call.

You provide a valuable service that ensures the safety of workers in restaurant cooking areas. Additionally, restaurant owners and managers will appreciate your diligence in keeping their operations safe and code compliant.

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