Food Service



INCIDENT

An accidental mix of cleaners – acid and bleach – generated toxic fumes that killed the manager of a Buffalo Wild Wings in Massachusetts, authorities said Friday.

The eatery's 32-year-old manager, Ryan Baldera, was killed and 13others were taken to the hospital, according to the Fire Department in Burlington, Massachusetts, a Boston suburb.

The accident occurred shortly after 5:30 p.m. when a worker began cleaning the kitchen floor just before the dinner rush.

But that employee did not know that an acid-based cleaner, Scale Kleen, had been spilled on the floor earlier. So when the worker used chlorine- and bleached-based Super 8 on the floor, the mixture turned green and started to bubble.

After that worker fled the kitchen with burning eyes and breathing issues, the manager grabbed a squeegee and tried to push the bubbling green concoction out of the restaurant and into an outdoor drain before he was unable to continue, according to the chief.

He was quickly overcome … and the squeegeeing led him to a severe medical condition.

Both the Scale Kleen and Super 8 cleaners had clear labels warning not to mix them with other products, according to fire officials.

Baldera died at Lahey Hospital & Medical Center in Burlington.

Memphis-based Auto-Chlor System appears to be the maker of both Scale Kleen and Super 8. But in a company statement, it only referred to Super 8.

"We understand the concerns, fears and questions you may have following the Buffalo Wild Wings chemical incident which may have involved Auto-Chlor's product SUPER 8," according to the statement.

"First and foremost, our condolences are with the individual and their family as well as those affected yesterday during the incident. The safety and well-being of our customers are our first priority, always."

The statement continued, "At this time, working with OSHA, local authorities, and emergency teams on site, we are doing everything we can to determine all details behind this incident."

A responding state hazardous materials team spread neutralizer on the floor and into the outside air, making the restaurant safe to enter hours later, officials said.

City officials closed the restaurant and it will need to get formal clearance from the Burlington Board of Health before it can reopen.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has opened an investigation at the Buffalo Wild Wings in Burlington “to determine whether or not there were violations of workplace health and safety standards in connection to his incident,” an agency spokesman said on Friday.

“Bleach by itself shouldn’t be deadly,” said Rick Sachleben, a retired organic chemist and member of the American Chemical Society. “However when it’s a mixed with incompatible chemicals, it can generate toxic gasses and that’s probably what happened here.”

He said millions of homes and businesses across America use these cleaning agents that are perfectly safe when properly used — and potentially harmful if combined.

“You can put all the labels you want, but there are lots of things we use on a regular basis that are potential dangerous,” said Sachleben.

“I mean, think about gasoline and how flammable and dangerous that is. But no one thinks twice about pulling up to a station and filling up with gas.”

NEED TO KNOW

The foodservice and hospitality industry is considered to be one of the largest employers worldwide, with well over 12 million workers in North America alone. As such a large business sector, the number of reported workplace injuries is disproportionately high compared to other types of work. This is also compounded by the fact that many of these workers are under the age of 20 and don’t always have the experience necessary to keep themselves safe.

Physical injuries, lost time and insurance claims have a huge impact on any industry, and foodservice is no exception. Every year there are hundreds of thousands of reported injuries coming from restaurants, bars, catering kitchens and food production facilities.

Specific job training and having a clear understanding of the role that prevention plays in minimizing workplace risk are the keys to safety. Loose, on-the-job training only goes so far, and it is strongly recommended that all workers seriously considering the field as a career undertake some sort of formal training. Many colleges offer courses in culinary arts, in addition to certificates for general foodservice workers. These programs are a great way to get a jump-start on the experience necessary to be both successful and safe.

Formal training prior to employment for all workers would be an ideal situation, but the reality is that the industry is very much built on a part-time and student workforce. In these cases, even with decent on-the-job training, there will still be a trial by fire when it comes to safety precautions.

BUSINESS / REGULATION

OSHA Rules and Regulations for Restaurants

While OSHA’s general rules and regulations also apply to foodservice businesses, it’s important to be aware of the specific hazards employees may encounter. Additionally,

one should be knowledgeable workers' OSHA rights.

OSHA Restaurant Hazards

There are a diverse range of potential safety hazards that employees can encounter at a restaurant on a daily basis. These general hazards include the following:

- Slips, trips, and falls on slippery floors
- Back and arm strain from lifting heavy trays and boxes
- Burns from hot serving ware and cooking equipment
- Cuts during food preparation
- Injuries from workplace violence
- Back and leg strain from standing for extended periods of time
- Skin or eye irritation from spilled chemicals

There is obvious potential for workplace injuries in foodservice environments. Detailed below are a few of the most effective strategies to keep a restaurant a safe place to work.

Ensuring Safety at Restaurant Work

Adhere to OSHA regulations for restaurant kitchens.

Food Handling

Employees who directly handle food should wash their hands and food prep utensils with warm water and soap before coming into contact with food. Make sure they're also thoroughly cleaning surfaces in prep areas in order to prevent the growth and spread of bacteria. They should also be wearing disposable latex gloves for maximized protection against foodborne illnesses.

Floors

Make sure your floors are clean and dry, especially near bars and sinks. These areas should have adequate drainage to keep pools of water from forming. Use rubber floor mats and raised platforms to keep employees safe. Additionally, ensure there are no loose tiles or bumps and holes in carpets rugs that workers could slip or trip on.

Kitchen Temperatures and Safety

Kitchens can become extremely hot over the course of a long shift, so it's essential to provide employees with cool areas to take their breaks in. When you're training new workers, teach them how to determine if someone is dehydrated or suffering from heat exhaustion. Similarly, make sure all employees know how to administer first aid to coworkers in need. Following OSHA regulations on the temperature of restaurant kitchens can go a long way towards keeping workers comfortable and safe.

Age Restrictions

Ensure compliance with OSHA restaurant age regulations concerning the type of work that minors can perform and how many hours they're legally allowed to work. These rules will vary based upon the minor's age – for example, individuals under age 16 may not cook, bake, handle knives, or use appliances that could result in injury. The number of hours your younger employees may work also varies based upon the time of year, as more work hours are typically permitted on days when the minor isn't at school.

STATISTICS

The number of **foodservice and bar employees** killed on the job jumped by 40% in 2015, one of the sharpest increases among all professions, according to new data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The increase was particularly dramatic for kitchen workers and servers, with a rise of 64%, the absolute highest among all the trades that were gauged, BLS reported.

However, the absolute numbers remained relatively low for **an industry employing more than 12 million** people, and one whose workforce has been growing by leaps and bounds. BLS found in its annual census of workplace fatalities that 165 foodservice and bar employees were killed while working in 2016, compared with 118 the year earlier.

The leading cause of deaths for kitchen workers and servers was homicide, which took the lives of 21 staffers. Nineteen of the murders were committed with a firearm, according to the statistics.

Another three took their own lives at their place of employment.

Overall, BLS noted, fatal workplace incidents increased 7% in 2016, pushing the total past the 5,000 mark for the first time, to 5,190 deaths. The most common causes were traffic accidents, which accounted for 40% of the casualties, followed by violence, at 23%.

The canvass of businesses revealed that workplace drug overdoses continue to soar, climbing 32% in 2016 alone. BLS noted that overdose deaths have risen by at least 25% in each of the last five years.

Four of the on-the-job foodservice deaths were caused by a drug or alcohol overdoes, according to stats made available to Restaurant Business by BLS.

PREVENTION

Preventive techniques and procedures play a huge role in ensuring workplace safety. The following provides guidance to prevent some common foodservice and hospitality practices.

Cuts & Working with Knives

- All applicable staff should be trained in the proper use of knives BEFORE they start to work.
- Knives work best (and are actually safer) when they are sharper and well maintained.
- Always store knives with the blades covered.
- Never leave knives lying on counters or loose in sinks where they could fall or be accidentally grabbed.
- For high production cutting or slicing, be sure to wear puncture-proof gloves and a protective apron.
- Keep all machine guards in-place on electric slicers and ensure that all operation is carried out by authorized personnel only.

Fire Safety

- All staff should be trained in fire safety and evacuation procedures. Don’t assume that everyone will know what to do in the case of an alarm.
- Keep adequate fire safety and suppression equipment within reach and ensure that fire extinguishers are suitable for all potential types of fires (grease, chemical, electrical, paper).
- Keep fire exits clearly marked and free of obstructions.

- Never leave ranges or stoves unattended while in use.
- Keep all cloths and aprons etc. away from hot surfaces or sources of flame.
- Keep range hoods and stoves free of grease build-up to the reduce the risk of fire.
- Do not overload electrical outlets, remove grounding pins from cords or use any equipment that appears unsafe.

Burns & Scalds

- Always use potholders to lift or move hot dishes.
- Give yourself enough room to move to avoid bumps and spills.
- Always stand back from equipment or containers that may release hot steam.
- Always wear long sleeves in the kitchen.
- Reduce water heater temperatures to avoid scalds.
- Install temperature or pressure relief valves and other safety devices on equipment to avoid explosive releases.

Slips & Falls

- Keep all floors, clean, dry and free of clutter.
- Footwear should have non-slip soles.
- Ensure that work areas have adequate lighting.
- Post signs or barriers to warn of wet or slippery floors.
- Use non-slip mats at workstations and in high traffic areas.
- Busy staff should communicate their movements with terms like ‘walking’ or ‘behind’ to avoid collisions with co-workers, especially when carrying hot items.

Moving Heavy Loads

- Always lift with your legs, take small steps, and don’t twist.
- Use a dolly, cart or a co-worker to help with heavy loads. Don’t be a hero.
- Store heavy materials at waist height to avoid bending or lifting overhead.
- Employees should wear a support belt when excessive lifting is expected.

General Tips

- All new employees should be fully trained based on their individual level of experience. Keep records and re-train where necessary.
- Conduct routine safety inspections and check all workplace elements that have been identified as hazardous.
- Ensure that the facility has adequate first aid supplies for the number of employees, and that management or assigned personnel are trained in their application. All significant injuries should be documented and kept on record.
- Post warning and reminder signs throughout the facility to help reinforce safety best practices.
- Make sure that employees are trained on the use of chemicals, the dangers of mixing, protective gear, storage and ventilation.

MORE PREVENTION / PROTECTION

- Ask questions if you don’t understand something or if you encounter a new situation.
- Dress for your job with safety in mind.
- Choose low-heeled, secure shoes with a non-skid sole and an enclosed toe. A falling coffee cup can inflict as much damage on your toes as a falling hammer if it lands the wrong way.

- Dress in light, layered clothing to allow for hot kitchen conditions or cooler dining areas.
- Talk to your supervisor about fire-resistant fabrics for kitchen work.
- Drink water frequently to prevent heat illness. Take your breaks in a cool place.
- Follow the designated traffic patterns to avoid collisions with other workers, especially at doorways and around stoves and fryers.
- Keep your mind on your work to prevent cuts and puncture wounds.
- Do not reach across steam tables, fryers, stoves and other hot surfaces and materials.
- Protect your hands from contact with detergents, cleansers and water by using gloves. Dry your hands and replenish the skin’s natural oils by frequently applying moisturizers.
- If you perform repeated tasks such as slicing food or running the cash register, be aware of developing pain or numbness in your hands, wrists and arms because these can be the first signs of repetitive strain injuries. Try to vary your movements and keep your wrists at a relaxed, natural angle. Don’t hunch over your work, even if you are creating a dessert masterpiece.