Knife Injuries Are Commonplace



INCIDENT

Mandolines, the paddle-like slicers are good for turning potatoes into French fries, cabbage into coleslaw, zucchini into noodles and a block of cheese into a spaghetti condiment. They're also good at turning hands into thumb less, blood-gushing appendages.

It's unlikely that mandolines alone are to blame but emergency rooms are seeing more and more kitchen wounds. The number of patients injured by slicers or choppers nearly doubled between 2001 and 2011, when an estimated 21,699 people sought treatment for cuts, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

NEED TO KNOW

To glove or not to glove – that is the question!!!

BUSINESS / REGULATIONS

Martha Stewart, Bon Appetit and Buzzfeed say that mandolines and knives belong to every wedding registry!!!

Traditional restaurant culture has lately become notorious for incubating verbal abuse, sexual harassment, addiction and wage theft. But in addition to the emotional and financial toll of kitchen labor, workers also have to cope with physical danger at a rate that rivals highway construction and transportation equipment manufacturing.

In a recent story outlining how to reduce common workplace accidents, the trade magazine Restaurant Hospitality advised operators concerned about the threat of cuts and lacerations to coach employees on proper slicing techniques, and to "keep a first aid kit handy, and regularly replenish bandage supplies."

Professional chefs have refused to adopt and accept the use of gloves almost universally much to the chagrin of the safety glove industry.

Safety glove sellers point out that there was also a time when hockey players shunned helmets and baseball players took the field without cups. They stress the cost benefits of keeping employees whole, citing lawsuits and time lost to injuries.

But this has not deterred professional chefs like Prohibition chef Analisa La Pietra.

La Pietra says "When injuries occur, it's people who are not paying attention or

using a paring knife to cut a butternut squash: There’s a reason it didn’t go well”.

A knife, LaPietra says, shouldn’t end up anywhere the person holding it didn’t intend for it to go. Construction workers wear hard hats because they can’t control what might fall on their heads, but chefs should have total authority over where a knife alights.

“If you’re in control of your knife, you shouldn’t need to be protected from it,” LaPietra says. Wearing safety gloves is, “almost like admitting you don’t know how to use your knife.”

LaPietra prefers bare hands when cooking, because she relies on touch to determine if a steak is cooked to the right temperature or a tomato is past its prime. “When you have gloves on it dulls your sensitivity. How can you connect with something when you’re not touching it? If you can’t feel it, you can’t put love into it.”

LaPietra concedes if it might make sense for some novices to glove up, since she’s seen too many of them trash perfectly good potato ends and squash nubs. They’re afraid to get close to the blades of the mandoline.

The debate over glove use in the kitchens of restaurants continues.

STATISTICS

Three out of every 100 South Carolina food service workers in 2017 suffered a non-fatal occupational injury, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. That adds up to 4,700 instances statewide. At the Medical University of South Carolina, which doesn’t distinguish between home and commercial kitchens in its record-keeping, close to 500 people have shown up with injuries related to knife contact or food preparation since 2014.

Under federal law, restaurants are required to take basic measures to keep their employees safe, such as mopping up spills and properly labeling chemicals used for cleaning. The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration doesn’t have any specific standards for restaurants, though, so it’s largely up to restaurant owners to take steps to prevent injuries.

PREVENTION

Much like the transition that occurred in the macho hockey world where formerly no players wore helmets to now where all players wear helmets, we will see changes in the folk lore of professional chefs to accept safety gloves.

Since then, a number of companies have introduced cut-resistant safety gloves, often accompanied by a promotional online video showing a wearer trying and failing to slice off his finger. While there isn’t any evidence to suggest new glove technology has made a serious dent in kitchen injury stats, more than 10,000 Amazon customers have left favorable reviews for an $11 lightweight glove hailed as life-changing.

“There were, of course, versions of cut-resistant gloves before,” says Anna Selecka, spokeswoman for the company, which in 2014 launched the NoCry glove. “But the gap was the cheap gloves were quite bad quality, and the other option was very expensive cut-resistant gloves for shucking oysters. Home cooks turn to us after an accident.”