

*Editor's Note: Safety Group Program Monthly Newsletter Article — Oct. 2021
Contact: Mindy Carrothers (303.361.4790, mindy.carrothers@pinnacol.com)*

Help Your Kitchen Workers Stay Safe Amid the Lingering Labor Shortage

While pandemic-induced [labor shortages have impacted every industry](#), they have hit restaurants and hospitality sectors especially hard. The Colorado Restaurant Association says [90% of restaurants in the state](#) face understaffing, with difficulty both hiring and retaining staff.

The labor shortage has forced restaurants to reduce their operating hours, increase wages and benefits to draw applicants, and ask employees to work overtime.

That has also resulted in a new urgency for safety measures in an industry where the use of hot cooking surfaces and knives can lead to injury. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, full-service restaurant workers are more than twice as likely as other private industry workers to [sustain cuts or lacerations that cause them to miss days of work](#). They're more than five times as likely to get a burn that requires time off.

New workers can be especially vulnerable. Restaurant workers are [35% more likely to be hurt in the first six months](#) on the job, with the most common injuries including lacerations, contusions, strains, sprains and burns. Here are some tips to protect your employees from common on-the-job injuries.

Institute an employee safety program

The first and most important thing you can do to protect your workers is start a worker safety training program, says Xavier González, a senior safety consultant at Pinnacol. "An effective training program should be the cornerstone of your culture," he says.

Look over our guide to developing a [food service safety program](#). Additional suggestions:

- **Ensure every new employee undergoes training:** Even people who have worked in the food industry for decades may not do things the way you want them to do it. Show the veterans and the new workers your preferences.
- **Demonstrate safety procedures:** In addition to explaining safety procedures, show your employees how to implement them. Carry out the task while they watch.
- **Ask workers to demonstrate procedures themselves:** After you show them what to do, watch them do it, too, so you can correct any errors.

Draw connections between your procedures and safety outcomes

Explain the reasons behind your safety measures. "Let employees know why the procedure is done the way it is and what is in it for them," González says. For instance, if you require workers to wear cutting gloves, explain that extra protection can stop them from cutting themselves. This reinforces the importance of following the rules.

"Turnover rates can be very high in the restaurant industry, and that's often because people don't like the rules and procedures you have in place," González notes. "Let them know that those procedures are not arbitrary."

Talk to other restaurant managers about their safety programs

González says it's easier to enforce rules when several restaurants introduce them together. "When all operators create rules and enforce them, employees know they will need to adopt the new procedure to perform their job in a safe manner," he says. For example, if all the restaurants in the area require slip-resistant shoes, then an employee has no choice but to get on board because all employment alternatives require the shoes.

Emphasize the importance of slowing down

Restaurants are [just as busy as they were pre-pandemic](#), and fewer people are doing the same amount of work. Employees may increase their pace to keep up with the new demands, but doing things quickly increases the chance of an accident or forgetting to follow a safety procedure. Reinforce to employees that you prefer they take an extra minute or two to do it right rather than do something fast and get hurt.

[Visit Pinnacol's blog](#) to see more tips on how to keep your employees safe. Contact our safety consultants at safetyoncall@pinnacol.com to ask questions about employees and masks.

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