


# Vital Records Protection: KEY ISSUES FOR THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

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*“Severe restaurant fires are NOT rare by any means, they are a very frequent call for me to attend...when conducting a cost benefit analysis for the purchase of suppression equipment or fireproof containers, the benefits clearly outweigh the cost and are essential in any business, especially restaurants.”*

*– Tom Klem, owner and principal engineer of TJ Klem & Associates, a full service fire protection-engineering firm*

The correct office equipment is a necessity in any business, regardless of the size or industry. From fax machines and complex computer servers to pens and paper clips, the purchasing of this equipment can occur in many different ways. For example, an owner or manager can proactively decide what will be needed to successfully run the business on a day-to-day basis and simply purchase it. Conversely, office equipment purchases are often made reactively to a need that was not previously anticipated. Either way, an essential piece of equipment in any office is a fireproof container. Specialized filing cabinets or safes protect vital records, cash, media and other valuables from disasters that were never seen coming.

All businesses and organizations are at risk of losing unprotected documents, electronic data that is not backed up and other non-replaceable items, but there are some industries that are especially susceptible to this risk. Restaurants, for example, are continually at a heightened risk for fire. The rushed, high-pressure scenario created when large numbers of customers demand that their food be cooked immediately and hurried to the table creates an enormous potential for fire. Open flames in that type of chaotic environment forces restauranteurs to prepare for the worst. Most restaurant fires are contained at the point of origin because of the strict regulations imposed on the industry, the proximity of extinguishers and the quick reactions of the cooks and staff. However, the frequency at which fires occur is much greater than in most other industries, creating a much higher chance that a devastating fire will start in the first place.

Restaurant fires can start in any number of ways: a deep fat fryer accident, a clogged chimney and hood over a char broiler, sparks from electrical equipment or even arson – the list goes on. Byron Rosenthal, owner of Hog Heaven – Open Flame BBQ in Ohio, has been fortunate enough not to experience any of those events at any of his three locations, but he takes precautions, just the same.

“We actually have four FireKing products,” Byron said. “One 2-door FireKing filing cabinet is used in our main office. It holds things like unused checks, lease agreements, back-up computer disks, employee records, titles, tax information and other important documents. We also have three FireKing safes, one in each of our restaurants. About three years ago we bought them to safeguard cash, gift cards and other important items that needed to be kept on hand at each of the locations and protected from fire, flood, theft or employee misuse.”

Most companies and organizations seek out FireKing products to protect vital items from being destroyed by fire. But in the case of one Redlands, CA, pizza restaurant, theft was the main reason that owner Chuck Wilburn decided to purchase a 2-drawer FireKing filing cabinet. A little over six months ago, Chuck's establishment, Shakey's Pizza Restaurant, was robbed. Valuable equipment from the restaurant was taken as well as lots of cash from an old filing cabinet kept in the office. Chuck went on to say why he was so impressed with the purchase he made immediately after the robbery.

"I didn't buy a FireKing because it was fireproof, I decided to get it because it was the most secure filing cabinet I had ever seen. Nobody would be able to simply bust it open like they did to my last one. The fact that it is also fireproof is just an added bonus. In fact, I wish that I had more room in the office to put a second and even larger 4-draw container. We are quickly running out of space in the smaller 2-drawer one. Now that I know that FireKing also makes safes, I am definitely going to look into purchasing a new one to replace the non-fireproof safe we are currently using."

Restaurants are often small sole-proprietorships or partnerships like the ones mentioned above, but there are just as many large corporations that own several locations and operate entire franchises. For example, DavCo, the world's largest Wendy's franchisee, has over 150 locations and is still continuing to expand. DavCo was granted exclusive development rights to Maryland, Washington, D.C. and Northern Virginia for the famous Wendy's fast food restaurants. Bigger corporations such as this have an even greater need for vital records protection.

Christina Stickel, DavCo Director of Retail Development, commented on their use of FireKing products at the corporation's Maryland headquarters.

"I've been working here for over thirteen years now, and just about two years ago we decided to buy a new 4-drawer FireKing filing cabinet. We just outgrew our old one. As we expanded, so did the number of important things that needed to be protected. Corporate paperwork such as minutes from our board meetings, IPO documents, legal information, franchise material and other sensitive items are kept in these cabinets for security. I am one of the only people in the office of almost 100 that has a key to open them. This way, only upper officers and myself have the ability to access these vital and sometimes confidential records. It provides some peace of mind that they cannot be destroyed in a fire or stolen by an employee."

The best way to ensure that nothing vital will be destroyed by fire is to properly plan ahead, before a disaster occurs. Because experts agree that it's not IF a fire will start in a restaurant, but WHEN.

Tom Klem, owner and principal engineer of TJ Klem & Associates, a full service fire protection-engineering firm, provides diverse clientele with fire protection, engineering assessments of fire losses and pre-incident hazards and develops operating procedures for loss prevention purposes. With over 35 years experience, including time served as chief investigator for the US Fire Administration and the National Fire Protection Agency, Tom is an expert at identifying potential risks and ways to minimize them.

“Severe restaurant fires are NOT rare by any means,” said Tom. “They are a very frequent call for me to attend. Without proper attention and maintenance to fire suppression systems, even the smallest fire can get out of control and become devastating. Also, poorly designed suppression systems can have the same effect. It seems to me that it's a simple decision for restaurant owners to be properly prepared for total destruction. When conducting a cost benefit analysis for the purchase of suppression equipment or fire proof containers, the benefits clearly outweigh the costs and are essential in any business, especially restaurants.”

Regardless of their size, there are things every single food service provider is looking to protect. Permanently losing any of the important documents, cash or other articles mentioned in this study can prove to be a fatal blow to a restaurant. But by using FireKing fireproof filing cabinets and safes, these companies can rest assured that nothing properly stored in them will be lost or destroyed.