



## Is Your Staff in the Dark About Handling emergencies?

By David Rothschild



We don't want to think about the possibility, but emergencies happen, and we need to be prepared for them. It all starts with a plan. Does your restaurant have a written plan in place for emergencies? Is a crisis management team in place, ready to take charge? Does each employee know his/her role?

This article is meant to get you thinking about your emergency preparedness. It's not meant to supersede any policies, systems and protocol already in place in your restaurant. Follow the procedures and directives that have been established by your property for handling emergencies. Here are some issues you need to be prepared to address:

### Fires

You know what happens when the fire alarm sounds. Most often, diners will continue to eat, and the staff will continue to serve the meal, oblivious to the annoying klaxon. It must be a false alarm, right? This attitude can lead to a delay in action, possible panic, and even injury or loss of life. We need to have emergency procedures prominently displayed throughout the restaurant, including emergency telephone numbers, along with a detailed floor plan indicating evacuation routes.

Do you hold regular fire drills? This is especially important for restaurants located within casinos and hotels, as exiting the property is more complicated than simply walking out the front or back door.

All employees should know where the fire extinguishers are located and how to operate them. Training should be ongoing, with help from the fire department. All supervisors and managers, both front- and back-of-house, should know how to activate the fire-suppression system in the kitchen. A plan for special-needs guests (such as the elderly and the physically challenged) needs to be in place. However, always ask these guests how to best assist.

### Flooding & Water Damage

A water line bursts, a sprinkler head breaks off, or other water problems occur in your kitchen or dining room. What do you do? To be prepared for these possibilities, ask your facilities staff to help you put together a plan that includes locations of water shut-off valves within your facility and addresses concerns such as safely disconnecting electrical equipment. All supervisors and managers should be trained in how to implement the procedures as outlined.

### Power Outages

When the lights go out and the POS screens suddenly darken, that's not the time to decide how to handle a power outage. Advance planning is the key to keeping things under control. Have these items on hand at the hostess station or another location that's convenient for staff to reach in a low-light setting:

- Candles or battery- or oil-powered lamps for restaurant tables
- A dedicated cell phone, in case the lines are down
- Several battery-powered calculators, handy to add up guest checks
- Manual credit card imprinters to finalize transactions
- Flashlights or lanterns to assist guests out of the restaurant and into their cars
- A battery-powered radio or TV to keep staff and guests informed

Electrical outages can also affect the food product you have in

stock. If you haven't already done so, have your walk-ins and freezers connected to your property's back-up generators to safely store perishables.

### Threats/Assaults

It's unfortunate, but in today's world these are situations we need to be prepared to address. First and foremost, you need to try to remain calm and rational. Here's some additional advice from the resources I've listed at the end of the article. Note that I've substituted calling security for calling 911, as that would be standard procedure at most casino properties.

#### Threats Against or Assaults on Guests or Employees

- Ask your security team to help you devise procedures on how to verbally diffuse the situation, to what extent staff may physically restrain the assailant to prevent injury to the person being threatened or attacked, and other possible scenarios and actions to be taken. Train all restaurant staff in these procedures.
- Call security and inform them of all available details.
- Always stringently adhere to company alcohol service and consumption policies, as overindulgence can trigger violent behavior.

#### Armed Person/Hostage Situation

- Call security and inform them of all available details.
- Stay on the line, if possible, until security arrives.
- As soon as safely possible, an employee should be sent outside of the restaurant to warn others.

#### Bomb Threat

- Prepare a telephone script to be used in the event a bomb threat call is received. This should include asking, "Why are you doing this?" the location of the bomb, and time of detonation and a reminder to the caller of the potential of serious injury to innocent people.
- Alert a supervisor, while continuing the call, so they can contact security.
- Keep the caller on the line as long as possible.
- Take copious notes, including beginning and ending time of call.
- Pay attention to background noises.
- Listen closely to the voice for clues.
- Report all information to a supervisor and security.

### Health-Related Emergencies

All restaurant staff should be trained in CPR and basic first aid. Enlist your local Red Cross in helping to implement a property-wide program. A first-aid kit should be readily accessible and contain treatments for minor burns, cuts, particles in eyes, etc. Other health concerns that most typically need to be addressed in restaurants include:

**Guest has an allergic reaction** — We need to stress the seriousness of allergic reactions to all restaurant personnel. Allergies are not the likes and dislikes of guests. They are an abnormal reaction to ordinary foods or substances. They can be life threatening. If a guest indicates that he has a food allergy, the server should check with the kitchen before any item is delivered to make sure the offending substance is not contained in his food. Never guess; always check with the kitchen.

Staff should know how to recognize the symptoms of an allergic reaction. These might include: constriction of the airways, shortness of breath, appearance of hives, swelling around

the lips or even loss of consciousness. When confronted with a possible allergic reaction:

- Stay calm. Call security and inform them of all available details.
- Make the guest as comfortable as possible.
- Ask the guest if he has any special medications, such as an EpiPen.
- Have the person lie still on his or her back with feet higher than the head.
- Loosen tight clothing and cover the person with a blanket.
- Place the person on his or her side to prevent choking.
- If there are no signs of breathing, begin CPR.

**Guest is choking** — All staff should be trained in the Heimlich Maneuver (not Heineken Maneuver, as a recent seminar attendee called it). It consists of a series of upward abdominal thrusts meant to induce an artificial cough strong enough to dislodge a piece of food from the air passage. Remember, you always ask first, "Are you choking?"

**Guest has a heart attack** — AEDs (Automated External Defibrillators) have become quite common in restaurant settings. They are used to resuscitate a person who has had a cardiac arrest. They're often brightly colored and should be mounted in protective cases near the entrance of the restaurant. All supervisors should be trained in the use of the AED. When starting up the AED, a second member of the crisis team should be calling security and informing them of the situation. Clear the area, make the guest as comfortable as possible and continue to reassure him that help is on the way.

You need to also be aware that, in cases where the emergency causes an obstruction of or interruption to the casino's surveillance and security systems, the entire property might need to be evacuated and closed. Under these circumstances, follow your security department's directives.

Emergency procedures for your restaurant should be revisited yearly. Get input from the front-line employees on what they need to implement the emergency response program. Mandate periodic review and drills. Be sure supervisors or managers are always visible during times of emergency. They can be a reassurance to both staff and guests that things are under control and a plan is in place.

And lastly, remember that while much of the responsibility for handling emergencies throughout the casino rests on the shoulders of your property's security team, an informed, proactive restaurant staff is the first line of defense in keeping emergencies from becoming disasters. **NAC**

#### Resources:

[www.firepoint.cc/foodservice\\_news15.pdf](http://www.firepoint.cc/foodservice_news15.pdf)

Preparing for disaster: recommendations based on the blackout of '03 By Robert J. Kwortnik, Publication: Cornell Hotel & Restaurant Administration Quarterly

[www.mayoclinic.com/health/first-aid-anaphylaxis/FA00003](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/first-aid-anaphylaxis/FA00003)

[www.bismarckstate.edu/reports/hr/handbooks/EmergencyManual](http://www.bismarckstate.edu/reports/hr/handbooks/EmergencyManual)

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