

# Fire Authority Training, Southern California

Adapted from “Tales of the Greaser,” submitted by Don Pfleiderer, Enviromatic

Thank you to all the area fire inspectors attending the exhaust system seminar in Oceanside, California! What a nice area, and it was at least 20 degrees cooler than what I left in Minneapolis!

I was joined by fellow IKECA member Mario Abab from Air Cleaning Technology, and I invited a nonmember to learn a little about how IKECA members provide training to AHJs. Also in attendance was the deputy fire marshal from San Diego who has since requested a half-day seminar for his jurisdiction in the near future.

I asked the inspectors in attendance to provide a show of hands to signify if they had ever been involved in having to extinguish or investigate a grease exhaust fire; several hands were raised. With the firsthand experience in the room, the pictures and protocols for proper inspections that I addressed were right on point. Good questions were asked, and a few of them deserve more attention in this write-up.

The first question was about rooftop areas and inspections. The AHJs stated that they really had no way to inspect the rooftop areas in their routine inspections. I showed them areas of concern during the seminar; we looked at pictures that showed many jobs that used shortcuts. It appeared that proper cleaning was done when looking down from the roof, but the bottom half to a quarter—where the largest fire dangers are located—is often missed, leaving thick,

old buildup. I noted that even though rooftop inspections might not be quite as important as the lower sections of the duct and the horizontal runs in the ceiling areas they should be done because fires starting on the roof and/or in the fan areas can go uncontrolled without fire suppression systems in those areas. As for the lower sections above the hood, I reminded the audience that proper inspection pictures should include a clear view looking up from the hood showing all four sides, including the back of the upper filter rail if possible.

Another question raised was about how far the inspector really needs to look if there is a hood sticker. I let them know that the hood sticker only means someone was there and that something was cleaned; it does not guarantee proper cleaning in accordance with NFPA 96 or *ANSI/IKECA C10: Standard for Cleaning of Commercial Exhaust Systems*. Once you are familiar with local kitchen exhaust cleaning (KEC) companies, that may be an indication of the job quality, but only after many previous complete visual inspections of their work should this be a factor. Even then, I noted that spot checks are necessary. According to NFPA 96, the minimum standard requires removal of all grease (combustible material). I shared that in a majority of the jobs I inspect around the country, this minimum standard is not necessarily attained, no matter what the hood sticker states. I pointed out how bad things have gotten in a suburb in my area that used to have one of the tough-

est and best KEC inspection programs in the country. Without these on-the-job inspections, almost every single horizontal duct I have inspected in the past two years has not been cleaned.

The moral of the story in this presentation was that a fire inspector must have the filters removed upon arrival at the location to look at the inside of the entire system during inspection. If the inspector cannot climb up into the hood, taking digital pictures with a camera using a monopod with a swivel head can easily show most areas.

Finally, I recommended that the group consider setting up an inexpensive licensing program to monitor KEC vendors. With the advent of digital cameras, once a fire inspector has his or her own baseline pictures of a system, the inspector can request pictures from the KEC to make sure it is conforming to applicable standards. Not only do the inspectors need to be reviewing these pictures, I also shared that they must be prepared to make the KEC go back and take additional pictures if there is anything unclear about what was documented.

In summary, simply looking to make sure there is a hood sticker is not adequate for any proper fire inspection program. A complete visual inspection is required to help prevent grease fires. Tools such as a digital camera with a monopod will help these inspectors tremendously in streamlining their inspection process.

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