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## Maintaining Safety and Sanitation in Your Bar and Nightclub

How Food Safety and Sanitation in the Bar  
Affects the Bottom Line

September is National Food Safety Education Month, a great time to brush up on the basics of cleaning, sanitation and health behind the bar in a restaurant, club or drinking establishment. Understanding and implementing concepts of health, sanitation and safety can mean the difference between a successful operation and a failed health inspection.

Just like a restaurant, bars can be breeding grounds for foodborne illness and health infractions. Fruit flies, dishwashing woes and refrigeration problems are all high on the list of potential problems owners and operators face every day when it comes to maintaining a safe, sanitary food and beverage business.

In an effort to offer the best tips for bar and nightclub operators, FoodServiceWarehouse.com has outlined its top recommendations for boosting profits and reducing safety issues. By focusing on adequate cleaning and proper storage, any operator can see great benefits—and even profits—in his or her drinking establishment.

## Cleanliness is Next to . . . Well, it's Important

Cleaning is one of the most important aspects of bar operation. From wiping down food contact surfaces to properly washing bar glassware, it is essential to maintain a high level of cleanliness in your operation.

### Abide by Your Local Health Code

Following your local health and safety regulations is the best way to manage any food and beverage operation. Check with your state, city and county laws to determine the exact mandates governing your location. These laws should inform all cleaning checklists and routines. This is the first step along the way to maintaining a sanitary establishment.

### Present a Clean Glass

Although it's important to maintain cleanliness everywhere in the bar, bar glassware is perhaps the most common supply item. Glassware is an important part of the drinking experience, and dirty glasses can send guests running.

- Lipstick stains on a martini glasses can prevent customers from ever returning, Ladies' Night or not.
- Chemical residue on a pint glass can leave a film that makes the beer flat and leaves a bad taste in the mouth.
- Without an adequate supply of clean glasses at the ready, your bartenders may be without the means to make enough new drinks during the happy hour rush.

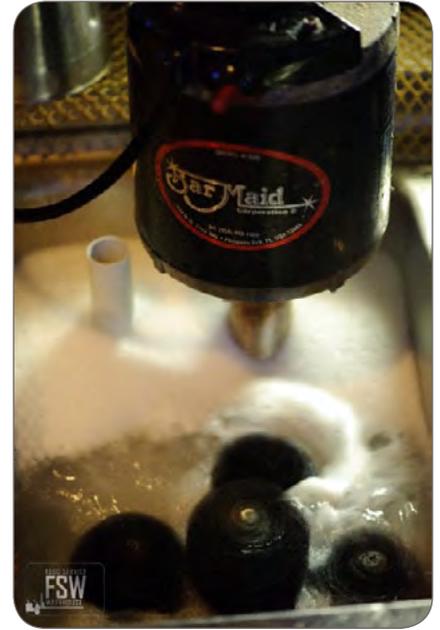
**Safety Tip:** Always use a dedicated ice scoop to retrieve ice from the ice bin. Scooping ice with a beverage glass can cause breakage, and broken glass among ice cubes is a disastrous situation.

The guest associates his experience of the bar with his personal cocktail or beer, and a dirty glass or a foul tasting drink can damage your bar's reputation down the line. Clean glasses ensure your drinks look and taste great, and this keeps you in business.

### Try an Electric Upright Glass Washer

When it comes to cleaning, most bars are required to install a compartment sink with an upright glass washer. To use an upright glass washer, the bartender rotates glasses back and forth and up and down on the brushes, removing excess beer or lipstick residue. This type of cleaning apparatus is ideal for a

small operation with the manpower to continuously wash dishes throughout each shift. However, this is the least reliable method during a rush. Lipstick and sanitizer residue could remain on the glassware, an unpleasant experience at best and a carbonation killer at worst. An electric glasswasher is a good choice for larger operations that need something slightly more reliable.



#### **Benefits for Your Business:**

- Washes dishes more thoroughly without relying solely on human labor
- Less stress placed on the bartender
- Low cost for replacement brushes
- Can be used in conjunction with an undercounter commercial glasswasher

Use this type of unit the same way for any glass, and wash glasses on demand. Just be on the lookout for lipstick smears, and be wary of chemical residue.

#### **Try a Commercial Glasswasher**

Depending on the set-up of the bar and how often you need glasses, a commercial glasswasher could be a good choice.

*“The automatic glasswasher is great for just getting stuff done at the end of the night,” said Niamh O’Shaughnessy, bartender at the Cherry Cricket bar and restaurant in Denver, Colorado. “You can just put [the glasses] all through that, and the cycle is only for three minutes, so it’s perfect.”*

#### **Benefits for Your Business:**

- Washes large loads all at once so you can be prepared with many clean glasses.
- Takes out the manual labor so bartenders can focus on drink preparation and customer interaction.
- Option to select a machine with a high temperature sanitizing rinse, ridding glassware of chemical or oily residue.

The downside of an automatic glasswasher is that the unit can take up significant space under the bar, and tie up a large load of glasses all at once—a big problem during a rush. Know your schedule and plan ahead to avoid running out of available glasses.

When it comes to cleaning, the key is to follow proper procedures for all food, beverage and ice supplies, as well as any food contact surfaces. When customers get a clean glass, the drinks taste better. When the beer lines are clean, less beer is wasted. When the establishment itself is tidy and clean, the whole operation is more inviting and guests are more willing to stay and spend money.

#### ***FSW Recommends:***

- *Bar sinks*
- *Upright glass washers*
- *Glasswashers*
- *Bar towels*

## Put a Lid on It: Storing Garnishes Safely

Although they are not the central aspect of the drink itself, garnishes can contribute major sensory appeal to a cocktail or even a beer. A garnish compliments a signature cocktail or even a pint of beer if paired correctly. A kabob of tropical pineapple and citrus makes any Mai Tai look more appealing, adding perceived value for the guest at low cost for you. For many bars, the signature drink menu is the major profit center, so keeping fresh garnishes on hand for your house specialties is critical.

Outside of their appeal, however, garnishes contribute to food safety concerns in bars and clubs. Preparing and storing garnishes requires a serious look at food safety and sanitation, especially due to the threat of contamination and fruit flies.

Store garnishes at appropriate temperatures out of the “Danger Zone,” (between 40°F and 140°F) to keep them safe, and ensure that they are prepared in a sanitary way.

## Prepare Garnishes Properly

Washing hands before and after handling garnishes is a must; at least 20 seconds with warm, soapy water. Be sure all fruits and vegetables are washed thoroughly in fresh water or in an approved produce wash before slicing and serving. Remove any stickers and cut away any areas that look damaged or bruised. Be sure to use a produce-only cutting board and a clean knife to slice garnishes (if needed). Toss old garnishes and prepare new ones every 24 hours.



### Store Food in Food Safe Containers

Store bar garnishes, beverage mixers and other food items in food-safe containers in the refrigerator until they are ready for use. Graduated food storage containers are a good choice for storing prepared garnishes in a back bar refrigerator until they are ready for use. At that point, a bar condiment holder makes the perfect home for olives, citrus fruits and cherries, and often has space in the bottom for ice packs to keep everything chilled. Keep a pair of tongs or a supply of cocktail picks handy for serving the garnishes; this is a common state law.

### Keep Fruit Flies Away

Every bar loves a regular, but the tables are turned when those regulars are fruit flies. Fruit flies are attracted to sweet, syrupy things like fruit and beer, and their potential for carrying disease or spreading bacteria is one that adds another spin to their already irritating existence. Here are our tips for keeping fruit flies at bay:

- Clean spills immediately
- Commit to thorough cleanings at the end of the night
- Store liquor, juices and garnishes with lids if possible

**Safety Tip:** Beer tap heads and soda guns are breeding grounds for fruit flies. Prevent larvae from growing up on your equipment by adding these items to your nightly cleaning checklist.

Keeping your product fruit fly and bacteria free will also preserve it from waste, meaning you will save money when you don't have to throw it away.

Many municipalities require that bartenders use liquor pourer covers to prevent fruit flies from getting into the spouts. Although this can be a detriment to the bartender when it comes to speed of pouring, the benefit of keeping a fresh, clean bottle of spirits outweighs the cost when it comes to safety and health.

***FSW Recommends:***

- *Graduated food storage containers*
- *Bar condiment holders*
- *Liquor pourer covers*
- *Tongs*
- *Cocktail picks*



## Monitor Temperatures Like it's Your Job... Because It Is

Most operations keep at least one refrigerator in the back bar area, which is important for storing prepped and ready-for-use items. This can also be a great merchandising opportunity. The key is to keep cold foods cold, and to monitor temperatures regularly to stay in the clear. The tips below show how incorporating proper safety techniques and choosing the right equipment can keep your bar profiting.

### Monitor for Safe Temperatures

Use calibrated thermometers to check the temperatures on all refrigerators in the bar area. All refrigerators should be running properly so garnishes, beverages and juices can be stored at a safe temperatures (below 40 ° F). Check temperatures at least once per shift.

### Try Glass Door Back Bar Coolers

Choosing the best bar refrigerator depends on spatial requirements and storage needs. While many operators prefer solid door coolers to hide away cocktail mixers and extra garnishes, a glass-door cooler chills beer and wine bottles while also acting as a merchandiser. When you combine visual appeal with bottle refrigeration, you can advertise your product with little effort.

### Choose a Refrigerator that Suits Your Bar

The most useful type of bar refrigeration will be the type that fits behind your bar and works to cool everything just as it should. Consider the focus of your establishment, and be sure to choose equipment that works with your product. If you run a wine bar, set up a wine cooler large enough to display some of your top-selling bottles. If beer is your specialty, keep bottled beer visible in a glass door cooler behind the bar.

**Tip:** If you have the option, select a unit with sliding doors to help preserve energy. Preserving energy can help keep precious energy dollars within your establishment rather than drifting right out of your checkbook each night.

***FSW Recommends:***

- *Refrigerator thermometers*
- *Back bar refrigerators*
- *Commercial wine coolers*
- *Commercial Beer Coolers*

## Your Employees are Your Greatest Allies

Communicating with your employees is a big part of creating a safe operation, a place your guests want to be. Since the industry is notorious for high turnover, many operators are hesitant about putting time and effort into training employees. The benefit comes when you and your employees are on the same page with sanitation, safety and overall operations, the threat of health code violations and accidents are reduced. Faulty inspections can affect your reputation, and a dirty environment can be a turn-off to any customer. What's more, taking care of a foodborne illness in your establishment can cost thousands. To keep profits rolling in as they should, it is in your best interest to engage your employees, and make training a team effort.

When it comes to training and teaching bartenders health and safety, a little knowledge goes a long way to preventing big problems. Here are some tips for productive employee training:

**Color-code chemicals and tools.** When cleaning chemicals, food preparation supplies and other tools are color-coded, it can be easier to train employees on the reasons for and connections to certain procedures. For example, using green cutting boards for all garnishes lets bartenders know that only fruits and vegetables are to be used on those surfaces. Similarly, some bars use only the color red or the color blue for sanitizing chemicals, which can help train employees to use the right chemicals in the right compartment sinks

**Tip:** For non-native English speakers on your staff, post translated signage explaining the safety guidelines, or utilize training tools that use images to convey meaning.

**Communicate the laws.** Many food safety procedures stem from state, city or county laws, put in place to prevent the spread of germs and bacteria. When state laws are involved, communicate this to staff so they realize that it's not just your rule—it's a local regulation. Part of this training should include food safety training and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) procedures. Customers recognize and appreciate compliance with health and safety standards, and this can improve your nightly guest traffic.

**Involve your staff.** Your staff is your best support system in identifying hazards and potential harms in the restaurant or bar. Treat your bartending and serving staff as part of the solution and you will find that you have automatic allies when it comes to food safety in your bar or club.

## Conclusion

Although it may seem that bar and restaurant safety and health are concerns that would not affect your bottom line, the fact is that a health code violation or an accident could cause your operation a pretty penny, defeating the profits you've worked so hard to earn. This month, it is especially important to refocus your efforts on engaging every employee to follow systems of cleaning, sanitizing and food storage so that you can keep up good habits all year long. When you have strong processes in place, you can focus on working for the profits and not worrying about the threats. Cheers!

## About FoodServiceWarehouse.com

FoodServiceWarehouse.com was founded in June of 2006 with a single business goal in mind: empowering food service operators to make their own businesses more successful. At FoodServiceWarehouse.com, we offer step-by-step assistance throughout the entire process of learning about and shopping for restaurant equipment and supplies. Our vast selection and educational resources create an incredibly comprehensive yet straightforward online shopping and learning experience, especially directed toward the bar and nightclub owner and operator.

When it comes to learning tools and resources, our one-of-a-kind Education Center is a great place to start. A library of free online articles, buying guides and downloadable tools gives you a comprehensive look at the food service industry from the inside out, and our Bar Specialty Store provides in-depth focus on the beverage industry specifically. When you need supplies, look no further than our Web site, where we offer over 100,000 items from nearly 300 manufacturers. To date, over 7,000 bars have come to us for supplies.

Our combination of comprehensive research materials, extensive product selection and customer-focused support process make FoodServiceWarehouse.com a one-of-a-kind experience for anyone in the food or beverage industry. For more information, please visit our website at [www.foodservicewarehouse.com](http://www.foodservicewarehouse.com).



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