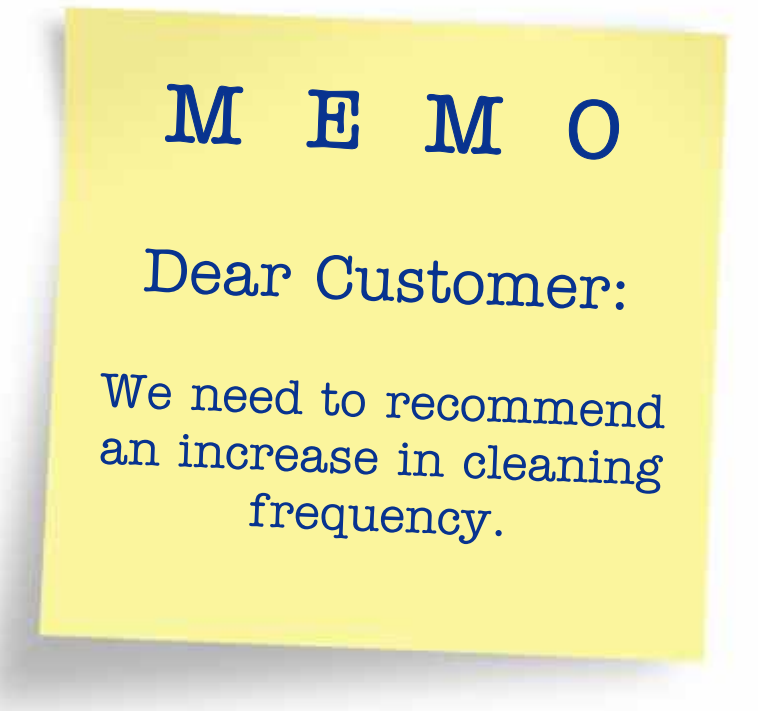
Utilizing the IKECA Depth Gauge Comb to Adjust Cleaning Frequencies

SEAN MCLAUGHLIN, CECS | DUNNWELL, LLC

What is the right frequency for a Kitchen Exhaust Cleaning? Rarely is this question answered the same by the customer and the exhaust cleaning operation contracted to remove the fuel from their systems. In an industry that is still on the cusp of receiving local and state support to mandate appropriate and all encompassing frequencies, the sad truth is that in most instances this decision comes from someone more concerned with budget than fire hazard and is usually based on either past history or sales volume. Sales volume is rarely an accurate frequency tool and does not take into account situations such as cooking type or hood design, and ultimately most locations will default to a maximum of a quarterly schedule, if possible. Of course, the KEC Company can make recommendations as part of a proposal and in some instances might even have to walk away from the opportunity if the frequency cannot be agreed upon without creating a liability issue.

From the inception of the business opportunity and going forward, it's usually up to the KEC company to prove to the customer what frequency they should be on and when to make adjustments to that schedule. The advent of digital photography helped the exhaust cleaning industry quite a bit because for the first time, we were able to show the customer what was going on in their ducts in order to build a stronger case for an improper frequency.

That being said, let's walk through how challenging this can become and how digital photography combined with the IKECA Depth Gauge Comb can provide clarity to this difficult situation. Let's suppose a company has secured the business, and let's assume that a quarterly service is agreed upon. However, upon performing the work either initially or over time, it's discovered that the frequencies are insufficient either by an escalating cleaning time required, unusual or excessive fuel accumulation, maxing out of the grease containment unit on the roof or any combination thereof. The cleaner is now between a rock and a hard place because even if they continue to clean the systems that now take twice as long as originally estimated, there is still a major liability issue for them if a fire occurs between visits as it's their sticker on that hood. This is where a program utilizing the IKECA Depth Gauge Comb can provide an organized and specific means to manage fuel accumulation and frequency needs. The best option is to actually build it into a service agreement as an objective monitoring process. In addition, this program can help protect the liability of a cleaner as an extension of their after service paperwork, especially if there is customer resistance to the frequency change request.



Here's how to utilize the Depth Gauge Comb in this manner:

1) If a cleaning frequency is suspect, take photo validation of that visit along with a Depth Comb swipe of the duct showing that you are about to clean a system that is at or above .125" and at critical depth.

2) Next, clean that system to bare metal and take a second picture showing that you've removed the fuel to an acceptable .002" level. This provides a snapshot in time showing that when the service was completed, the system was back into compliance. That second shot of an acceptable .002" level also helps to educate some customers whom perceive a bare metal cleaning to mean a duct 'restoration' with a shiny, stainless steel look. This allows the cleaner to prove that he's removed the fire hazard without having to take into account situations like duct age or color when looking to build this case.

3) Finally, upon arriving for the next scheduled cleaning, take another 'before' swipe with the comb along with accompanying photo validation. If a .125" critical depth is once again achieved, the cleaner now has assembled a complete case for a frequency change to present to his customer that is

backed up by NFPA 96 Code 11.6.2. This should be done in the form of a customer service bulletin similar to how many companies alert their customers of deficiencies or non-compliant systems.

Required frequency changes are not always easy discussions to have with a customer whom is usually not very happy about the frequencies they might need to pay for as it is. However, utilizing this system of frequency measurement can continue moving that nationwide customer base toward a more 'code driven' mind set to their systems without putting the cleaning company in the position of having to convince that manager or facility director that it's merely their opinion that a change is required.

In summary, while we all await additional support and enforcement of NFPA 96 from state and local officials, a frequency change communication process utilizing the IKECA Depth Gauge Comb is the best means of removing the ambiguity that is still sometimes tied to the cleaning frequency. A Depth Gauge program also puts the KEC Company providing a service one step closer to ensuring an NFPA code driven aspect to their frequency of service while educating the customer at the same time.

Sean McLaughlin is Vice President of Kitchen Exhaust Cleaning Operations for Dunnwell, based out of the corporate headquarters in Garner, NC.