What to check before a commercial kitchen hood inspection

A commercial kitchen hood inspection goes more smoothly when the paperwork and the physical condition of the exhaust system tell the same story. The aim is not to make a space look perfect for one day. It is to show that grease control, cleaning routines and records are being handled consistently, especially where cooking volume is high and equipment is used every service.

Before the visit, walk through the kitchen with a practical eye. Look at what an inspector would see from the floor, inside the hood, along the ductwork and in the files. Small gaps in records often cause more confusion than a visible patch of grease, because they make it hard to prove that maintenance is routine.

Records that should be easy to find

Start with the documents. Keep compliance records in one place, whether that is a binder by the office door or a clearly named digital folder. The format matters less than being able to find the right paper quickly without searching through drawers during the visit.

- **Service report history.** Recent reports should show the date, the areas cleaned and any notes left by the technician. A gap here can raise questions about whether the system has been maintained on a regular schedule.
- **Inspection frequency.** Keep evidence of the routine being followed. If cleaning happens more often because the kitchen cooks heavily or uses solid fuel equipment, the records should reflect that pattern.
- **Before and after photos.** Photos help explain the condition of hard to view areas such as ducts, fans and roof components. They are most useful when they are labelled by date and location.
- **Repair notes.** If a problem was found and corrected, keep the note with the related report. Inspectors often want to see that a defect was not ignored.
- **Access details.** If roof access, clears, or restricted areas need arrangement, note who can provide entry. Delays on the day can turn a simple inspection into a longer disruption.

For restaurants using cleanhoodpros.com as part of their broader maintenance approach, the same principle applies: documentation should match the real condition of the system. A tidy file is useful, but it cannot replace a kitchen where filters, hood surfaces and exhaust components are maintained properly.

Hood surfaces and grease points

The hood is the first thing most people associate with kitchen exhaust cleaning, and for good reason. It collects grease, steam, smoke and airborne particles before they travel into the ductwork. Check the visible surfaces from a safe standing position, with equipment shut down where appropriate and without attempting any work at height.



Look for sticky film along the hood canopy, around the filter frames and near the front edge. A light sheen can build up quickly in a busy kitchen, but thick or dark residue suggests cleaning is

overdue. Pay attention to corners and seams, where grease can collect unnoticed. If the buildup is beyond ordinary surface cleaning, arrange for a qualified professional rather than trying to scrape or spray your way through it.

Filters deserve particular attention. They should sit securely in their frames and show no signs of warping, heavy loading or damage. A filter that is overloaded can let grease pass into the duct, while a loose filter can create airflow problems. Remove and inspect filters only if that is part of the normal kitchen routine and the equipment is off. Do not handle sharp edges carelessly, and do not clean filters in a way that creates a fire risk or damages them.

The inside of the hood matters too, but only check what can be seen safely. A flashlight can reveal wet grease, drips or residue above cooking equipment. If access panels are involved, leave opening and assessment to a trained person if they are elevated, awkward or part of a sealed assembly.

Ductwork, fans and roof areas

Much of the exhaust system sits out of sight. Ductwork may run above ceilings, through service spaces or up to the roof. Inspectors may ask how these areas are accessed and when they were last cleaned. That is why service reports and photos are useful long before the appointment.

From ground level or safe viewing points, look for obvious signs such as staining, drips, unusual odours or grease marks around joints. Do not climb ladders, enter roof spaces or open panels just to get a better look if that would put you at height or expose moving parts. Roof fans and exhaust outlets should be assessed by someone qualified to work in those areas.

Airflow changes can also be a clue. Smoke that lingers, heat that collects in the kitchen, or a hood that seems weaker than usual may point to blocked filters, duct restrictions or fan issues. Those signs need proper investigation. A qualified professional can check the system without bypassing safety controls or disturbing components that should remain sealed.



Fire safety and access around the system

An inspection is not only about cleanliness. It also considers whether the system can be safely maintained and whether fire protection features are in a usable condition. Keep the area around the hood clear of unnecessary boxes, deliveries and portable equipment. A cluttered workspace makes inspection harder and can hide grease-prone areas.

Fire suppression components should be visually present and unobstructed, but they should not be tested, reset or adjusted by unqualified staff. If tags are missing, components look damaged, or there are signs of discharge, flag it for a qualified professional. The same applies to electrical parts, switches and controls. Note visible concerns from a safe distance, then leave the fix to someone trained.

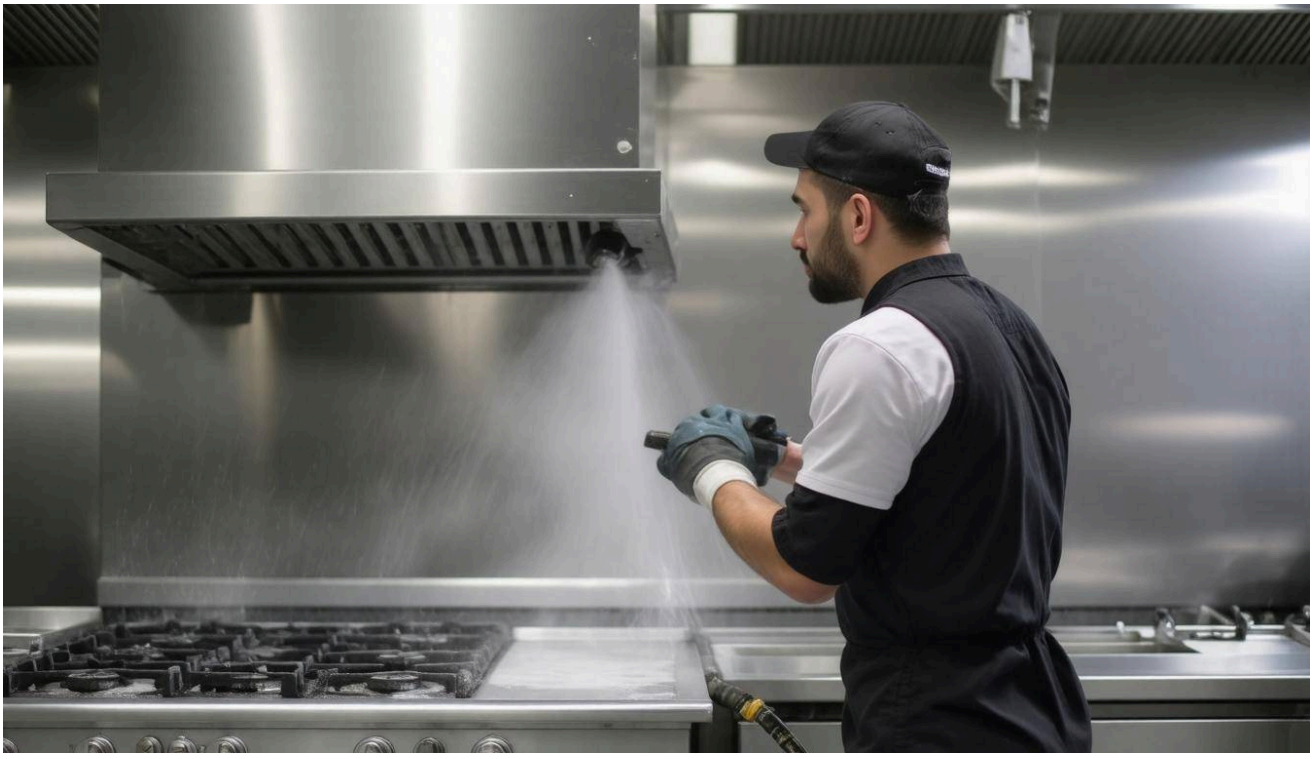
Check that access points are not blocked by stored items or fixtures. Clean-out openings, panels and service spaces need to be reachable when maintenance is carried out. If a cupboard has been fitted in front of an access point, or stock is stacked against it, clear it before the visit. This is a simple change that can prevent a delayed inspection.

Matching the paperwork to daily kitchen practice

Good hood cleaning documentation reflects how the kitchen actually operates. A charbroiler, wok range or high-volume fryer can create very different grease loads from a low-output prep kitchen. If cooking volume has increased, the cleaning routine may need to be reviewed. Records that show the same dates, signatures and comments every time may look tidy, but they can also seem disconnected from the real workload.

Daily and weekly tasks should be clear to staff. Filter cleaning, surface wiping and waste handling all affect the condition of the hood and exhaust system. Write down who is responsible and when the task is due, using plain language that suits the team. Avoid vague entries such as "checked hood" if they do not say what was examined or what was found.

In another part of the file, keep notes on any changes to equipment or the kitchen layout. New cooking line, moved appliances, altered duct routing or changed operating hours can all affect the exhaust system. When those changes are recorded, an inspector can understand why conditions or maintenance needs may have shifted.



A final walk before the inspection

On the day, do a calm walkthrough rather than a rushed cleanup. Check that filters are seated, hood surfaces are free of fresh spills, floors below the cooking line are clear, and the document file is ready. Remove food waste and packaging that might attract pests or obstruct access.

Make sure someone available on site knows where the records are and who can answer basic questions about the kitchen routine.

If a problem is found, a useful response is to record it and arrange the right follow up. Inspections often reveal details that are hard to see during daily service. The best preparation is not a one-time scrub, but a steady system of cleaning, observation and records that makes the condition of the exhaust system easy to understand.