What to inspect across a commercial kitchen hood and exhaust system

A commercial kitchen exhaust system works as one connected path. Air, heat, grease and vapour leave the cooking area through the Hood canopy, move through filters and Ductwork, then reach the Exhaust fan and the outside discharge. Commercial exhaust cleaning is not only about the visible metal above a range. A practical inspection follows the whole route, because a clean hood can still sit above a dirty duct or a fan that is struggling to pull air.

The safest approach is to separate routine visual checks from work that needs trained access. Staff can notice changes during normal kitchen hours: odours, drips, unusual noise, loose fittings, or grease collecting faster than expected. Internal cleaning, roof work, electrical faults and anything involving gas appliances belong with a qualified professional. The notes below focus on what to look for, why it matters, and when to stop and call for service.

Start at the Hood canopy

The canopy is the first control point. Look up from a safe position without climbing on benches or reaching over hot equipment. The underside should look sound, with no missing panels, sharp edges, sagging sections or loose fasteners. Grease that has built up along seams or at the front lip can drip onto food or cooking surfaces, so the condition of the edges matters as much as the centre of the canopy.

Check that the canopy sits over the cooking line as intended. If appliances have been moved or added, the capture area may no longer line up with the heat and vapour source. That can leave grease travelling into the room instead of into the exhaust path. A poor fit also makes cleaning harder, because deposits collect in places that were never meant to take the load.

Light and glare can hide problems. When the cooking equipment is off and the area is cool, inspect the interior surfaces for sticky residue, flaking paint, damaged seals and signs of moisture. Stainless surfaces may show streaks where air is pulling unevenly. Those streaks can point to a blocked filter, a fan issue, or a gap where air is entering from the room.



Inspect grease filters before they become a fire path

Grease filters are designed to catch airborne fat before it reaches the duct. Remove only filters that are cool, accessible and safe to handle, following the kitchen's own procedures. Hold them up to a light source. A filter that looks shiny with grease, has clogged mesh, warped frames or damaged handles is not doing its job well. Heavy loading also raises the chance of grease dripping or igniting in the wrong place.

Pay attention to fit. A filter that is slightly too small, installed backwards, or missing its latch can let grease bypass the device. That residue then settles inside the duct where it is harder to reach. Baffle filters and mesh filters differ in how they separate grease, but both depend on correct orientation and a snug seat. If a filter will not sit flat, the issue is not a minor annoyance. It changes the way the whole system performs.

Where filters are washed on site, use the method and product approved for that kitchen. Degreaser strength, water temperature and handling rules vary, and mixing chemicals is not a job for untrained staff. A damaged filter should be replaced rather than forced back into service. Bent frames can cut hands, loosen seals and leave gaps that defeat the purpose of filtration.

Follow grease containment and ductwork

Grease containment includes the parts that catch and hold residue after the filters: troughs, cups, drain points and lower duct sections. These areas often tell the story of the system. A cup that fills quickly, a trough with standing grease, or a stain beneath a joint can show where residue is escaping. Empty and clean accessible containers before they overflow, and record repeated build-up as a sign that filters or airflow need attention.

Ductwork should be checked from the outside for secure joints, dents, gaps and vibration marks. In a kitchen, visible grease at seams is a warning sign. Inside the duct, access panels allow closer inspection, but opening panels and working inside ducts is specialist work. The reason is straightforward: internal surfaces may be slippery, sharp, confined or contaminated, and the work may involve access above ground level.

Ask what the access points reveal during professional servicing. The answer should cover the condition of internal walls, the thickness and type of residue, the presence of standing grease, and whether any section is hard to reach. A duct that looks fine from the room can still hold heavy deposits behind a bend. Bends, transitions and horizontal runs tend to collect more because grease has more chance to settle there.

Kitchen Hood Cleaning and Maintenance | Clean Hood Pros is a useful reference point when a restaurant wants to connect day-to-day kitchen checks with professional exhaust system maintenance and compliance-focused documentation. That connection matters because a clean-looking canopy does not prove the duct and fan are in good condition. Records also help show what was checked, what was found, and what was corrected.



Check airflow signs at the Exhaust fan

The Exhaust fan creates the pull that moves air through the system. Staff rarely inspect the fan directly, especially when it is on a roof or outside the kitchen, but they can notice performance signs. Smoke, steam or cooking odour lingering in the room may indicate weak extraction. A fan that suddenly becomes louder, rattles, hums differently or cycles oddly should be reported rather than ignored.

From a safe viewing point, look for obvious damage around the fan housing: loose mounting, missing guards, corrosion, water entry or grease trails. Do not touch moving parts, remove guards or try to free a stuck fan. Electrical faults and work at height need a qualified professional. A fan that is out of balance can damage bearings and mounts, while a blocked or incorrectly set system can place strain on the motor.

Airflow problems are not always fan problems. Closed dampers, blocked filters, collapsed internal duct sections and make-up air issues can all reduce performance. This is why a single symptom should lead to a broader inspection. If the room feels starved of air when the exhaust runs, that may affect combustion appliances as well as comfort. Gas-related concerns should be left to a qualified gas technician, with the supply shut off only if that can be done safely.

Look for pressure washing and rust risks

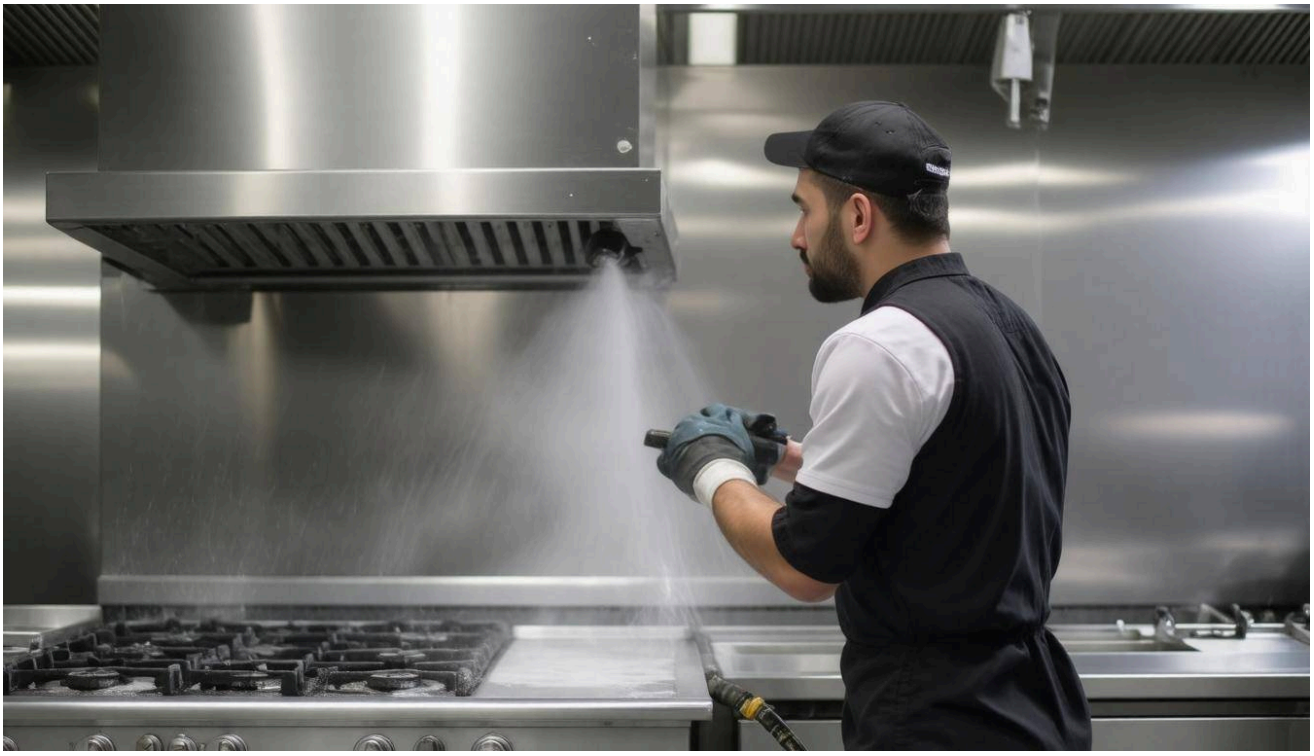
Pressure washing has a place in commercial exhaust cleaning, but it is not suitable for every surface or every area. Water forced into electrical fittings, seams or unsealed ducts can create corrosion, loosen residue, or send contaminated runoff into the wrong place. The method needs controlled access, containment and drying time. In a working kitchen, casual washing can turn a grease problem into a slip hazard or a moisture problem.

Rust prevention is easier when small faults are caught early. Look for chipped coating, wet insulation, dripping joints, loose fasteners and stains around penetrations. Moisture plus salt or grease can speed deterioration. Once rust takes hold on a fan housing, duct seam or canopy edge, the repair may be more involved than a surface clean. A professional can judge whether a section needs sealing, coating or replacement.

Keep a simple record of repeated trouble spots. A stain that returns after cleaning, a filter that loads unevenly, or a fan noise that comes and goes can point to the underlying cause. Notes do not need to be technical, but they should be clear: what was seen, where it was seen, and whether cooking equipment was running at the time.

Use a short routine that people can follow

The best routine is one that fits real kitchen work. Long written procedures often get ignored, while a few clear checks can become habit. Assign responsibility so that observations are not left to chance, and make it easy for staff to report a problem without trying to repair it themselves.



- Canopy surfaces: look for drips, sticky edges, loose panels and gaps after equipment is cool.
- Grease filters: check for heavy loading, bent frames, correct direction and secure seating.
- Grease containment: empty accessible cups or troughs before overflow and note repeat build-up.
- Duct and fan signs: report grease at joints, rattling, weak extraction, lingering odour or smoke.
- Documentation: record what was checked and what was passed to a qualified service provider.

Kitchen Hood Cleaning and Maintenance | Clean Hood Pros also fits into the wider topic of compliance-focused documentation for restaurants. The point of documentation is not paperwork for its own sake. It gives managers a way to show that grease filters, canopy surfaces, accessible containment points and system performance were observed, and that faults were escalated.

Know where the limits are

Some checks belong in the kitchen, others do not. Staff should not climb to reach ducting, remove fan guards, open sealed equipment, work on mains electrics, interfere with safety switches, or handle a gas fault. Those tasks carry real risk and can cause damage when done

without training. A visible symptom is still useful. Reporting it early can prevent a small fault from becoming a shut-down, a damaged fan or a contaminated duct run.

Commercial exhaust cleaning works best as a shared discipline. Daily observation catches obvious changes, scheduled filter care limits grease carryover, and professional service addresses the parts that cannot be seen from the floor. When the canopy, filters, containment, ductwork and fan are all considered together, the kitchen is better placed to manage fire risk, airflow and compliance records without relying on appearances alone.