

# Mayor Mamdani's Small-Business Fee Order Collides With NYC's Fire-Safety Reality for Restaurant Hoods

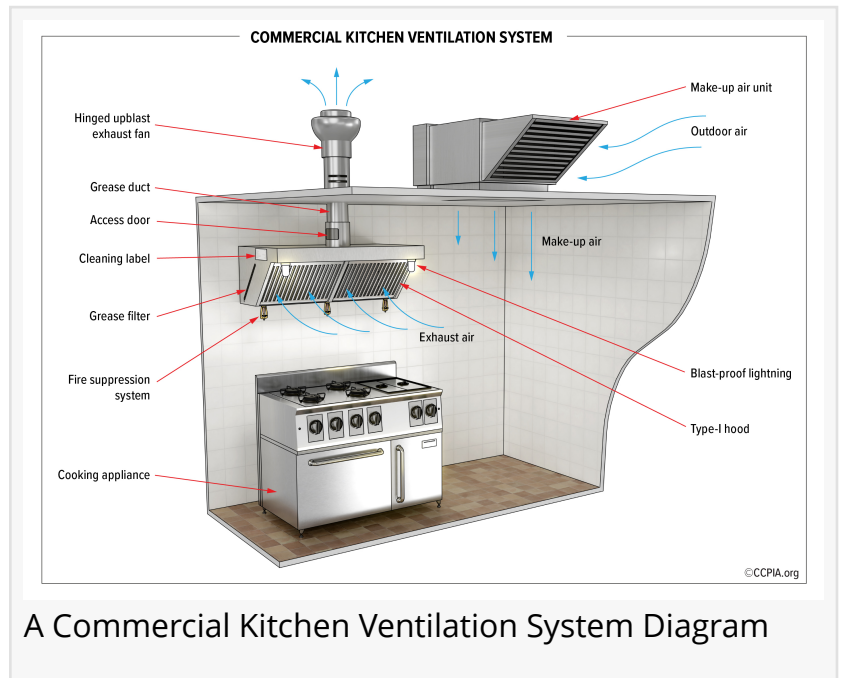
*Zohran Mamdani begins his tenure as New York City's mayor with Executive Order 11, restaurant owners feel relief from some government fees and penalties.*

BROOKLYN, NY, UNITED STATES, March 2, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As Zohran Mamdani begins his tenure as New York City's mayor with Executive Order 11, many restaurant owners feel a sigh of relief that some government fees and penalties may be scaled back. But for kitchens that live and die by their ventilation systems, Mayor Mamdani's pledge to cut red tape is

only part of the story. In practice, no executive order can change the immutable reality of the Fire Code: hoods, ducts, and fans must be cleaned and maintained on schedule, and any lapse can ignite literal flames. In short, reducing permit and licensing fees is welcome news – but it doesn't mean a laissez-faire approach to hood safety. As [Filta Kleen](#) technicians often say, the city's fire-safety regulations “don't care who the mayor is” when it comes to grease fires.

Executive Order 11 (signed January 3, 2026) directs several agencies – including the Departments of Buildings, Environmental Protection, Health, and the Fire Department – to inventory fees and penalties imposed on small businesses and propose reductions. Its stated goal is to “deliver relief from fines and fees that make it harder for small businesses to open and stay open.” In practical terms, that could translate to lower initial fees for DOB filings, FDNY cooking system permits, or annual re-inspection costs. For a restaurant planning a renovation or a hood replacement, those savings can add up. It might mean spending hundreds less on a permit application or avoiding a surprise fine for a minor paperwork error. Operators will certainly appreciate any trimming of bureaucratic costs when profit margins are so tight.

Yet alongside the “good news” of lower fees is the “bad news” that compliance obligations



A Commercial Kitchen Ventilation System Diagram

themselves haven't changed. The NYC Fire Code still requires that all commercial cooking exhaust systems be professionally maintained and fully functional. That starts with the hood and filters over the cooking equipment, but it extends through the entire ductwork, exhaust fans, and even any air filtration or control devices. By law, this entire system must be inspected and cleaned on a regular schedule – typically every three months for most restaurants – and it must be cleaned again immediately if grease deposits reach 1/8 inch (about 3.2 mm) in thickness. Those deposits are precisely what make kitchen fires so dangerous: if a stove top flare-up isn't contained, grease in the ducts can catch fire and spread rapidly. Thus, even if Mamdani's order lightens one part of the burden, the core fire-safety rules remain ironclad.

Owner and operators are acutely aware of this. Many veteran restaurateurs joke that hood compliance is life or death and not because the mayor said so, but because FDNY says so. The worst-case scenario happens so fast that it's engrained in the industry's consciousness: a greasy duct plus a spark equals a blaze that can shut down a restaurant in minutes. When kitchens deteriorate to that point, the result is never a minor expense. Instead, it triggers emergency restaurant kitchen hood repair, major

downtime, insurance headaches, and possibly fines for endangering public safety. FDNY routinely makes examples of egregiously neglected hoods in news releases, citing the same NYPD data that put cooking equipment fires as the leading cause of restaurant fires. One recent FDNY guide bluntly warns owners that failing to keep the system clean “risks your business, your



A dirty exhaust duct that is about to be cleaned by a Filta Kleen technician



A Done Right hood cleaning specialist cleaning a commercial kitchen's grease filters and hood at a Japanese restaurant

customers, and first responders”.

Given that risk, many restaurant teams treat hood maintenance as a daily responsibility. Kitchen staff are trained to empty and clean filters every day; night staff wipe down hoods and vents after service. But beyond the basics, the real planning happens with the maintenance crew. Commercial kitchen hood installers and service companies typically set up recurring schedules: quarterly cleanings on the calendar, with reminders for filter exchanges and duct inspections. The restaurants that do this consistently reap the benefits: kitchen comfort is better, overhead costs on repairs are lower, and inspectors find fewer violations. Those who fall behind usually know it. “If you skip maintenance, you’re literally playing with fire,” says Jeremy Martin, a Filta Kleen Co. technician who has seen too many neglected systems. His colleague Marvin Ortiz adds, “We tell clients to listen and look. If your exhaust fan is making weird noises or your hood lights keep flickering, call us before it breaks completely.” These simple rules of thumb capture a harsh truth: most hood emergencies begin with something preventable. A rattling fan bearing or a sagging damper often means that grease has piled up somewhere or a part is on its last legs. If fixed early, those problems are routine.

Statistics reinforce this anecdotal evidence. National fire reports consistently show that over half of all fires in restaurants originate in cooking equipment. In fact, decades of U.S. fire data estimate that cooking appliances account for about 60–70% of fires in food service establishments, with grease in hood systems responsible for a large share of those. In New York City specifically, enforcement data repeatedly list failure to clean hoods as one of the top fire-code violations seen on inspection. (NYC requires every restaurant to post its health-inspection grade visibly; a single fire-safety violation can cause a bad grade and swift social-media backlash.) Even aside from fire, a clogged hood means hot, smoky, and unhealthy kitchens – a recipe for both unhappy workers and negative Yelp reviews.

Mamdani’s executive order recognizes that city regulations can be a heavy load on small businesses. But the restaurants themselves know that the hidden value of compliance is keeping the doors open and the ovens running. Proper maintenance of the exhaust system isn’t a marketing gimmick; it’s a fundamental expense of doing business safely. Some business owners admit they will gladly pay a fair price for cleaning every quarter – as one said, “It’s cheaper to schedule a cleaning than to explain a dirty hood on Yelp or, worse, the evening news.” That pragmatic attitude aligns well with the city’s goals of fire prevention and economic health. When building and fire officials say “do it by the book,” a smart restaurateur hears “protect your livelihood.”

Even with a customer-friendly mayor, non-compliance can hurt a lot. For example, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection can impose fines up to \$10,000 per day if a grease interceptor is found overflowing or not properly maintained (violating sewer-use rules). While EO 11 might trim some civil penalties, it cannot eliminate those large fines if a trap is ignored. Similarly, the annual BDNY licensing and FDNY fire inspections will still happen. The FDNY mandate that only W-64/P-64-certified technicians may clean ducts has no flexibility – owners

caught hiring uncertified help face immediate violations, and that rule directly ties into approvals for the commercial cooking permit. In fact, the city's business portal explicitly warns that exhaust systems "must be cleaned by a W-64/P-64 Certificate of Fitness holder working for an FDNY-approved company," and that this work is required at least every three months. In a sense, FDNY and DOB act as a backstop to ensure that there's no shortcut: you might save on fees, but no one on the inside staff can substitute for the licensed pro who holds the key to a passed inspection.

Another big piece of the compliance puzzle is coordination with [fire suppression](#). A restaurant's hood system doesn't just ventilate – it's also tied to wet-chemical sprinklers and alarms under the hood. The NYC Building Code and NFPA 96 standards require that cooking equipment's fire-suppression system be pre-engineered and UL-300-listed, tested yearly, and integrated with the hood. If new appliances are added or major changes occur, that triggers what the city calls a "micro-switch inspection" essentially verifying that the grill (or fryer) will trip the hood fan off if a fire suppresses. According to NYC311 guidance, this micro-switch test must be booked through FDNY and only a licensed master fire suppression contractor can arrange a re-test after a failure. In practice, this means a coffee shop adding a new countertop fryer or a pizzeria switching ovens needs to immediately call their suppression contractor they can't bypass the process without risking an FDNY rejection. That level of interlock testing isn't going away just because administrative fees might.

Despite the weight of rules, many veteran operators view Executive Order 11 positively as a chance to get clarity and help, rather than as an excuse to slack off. If anything, the mayor's reform drive is an incentive to get one's paperwork in order. One hope is that by January's directive, agencies will standardize some processes: for instance, if DOB can speed up mechanical plan reviews for hood installs, a restaurateur can add gas appliances sooner. Or if FDNY simplifies the permit renewal filings, a cleaning crew can book inspections without months of wait. Even small improvements like those can be a boon. Restaurant managers know that in a tight market, saving a week of lost preparation or avoiding an unexpected late fee can be the difference between profit and loss on a project.

But every experienced operator also knows the mantra: better safe than sorry. The city doesn't advertise it, but FDNY has a public safety goal of zero kitchen fires, and inspectors won't ease up just because a mayor asked for savings. Clean [commercial hoods](#) are lower liability; non-compliant hoods risk closure. In fact, Mamdani's order itself hints at this duality: it calls for reducing initial penalties but still cites health and safety as critical. When agencies start listing every small-business fine, owners may realize that some fees could vanish while major fines and safety standards endure. A zero tolerance for grease fires doesn't change; only the ancillary fees might.

So what is the pragmatic strategy for owners under Mayor Mamdani's agenda? Don't mistake fee cuts for code relief. Keep treating the hood system as the heart of the kitchen. One practical tip: operators might use their freed-up bandwidth from permits to invest even more in preventative

maintenance. If a DOB plan review runs 10% cheaper or faster, perhaps those savings can fund a more frequent filter change or a better grease trap. Some kitchens even combine services – contracting the same company for hood cleaning, grease trap pumping, and fire suppression inspection – since a coordinated visit is often more efficient. The industry now has better service scheduling tools, and owners are wise to use them, especially as more agencies push digitization.

In the final accounting, the “cost of doing business” in NYC still has two columns: administrative costs (permits, fees, inspections) and safety costs (maintenance, repairs, compliance). Mayor Mamdani’s Executive Order 11 may lower the first column somewhat, but it won’t empty the second. Restaurants will continue budgeting for hood cleanings, exhaust fan upkeep, and shock absorber replacements on the roof vents – because if those expenses aren’t paid, the bill can be catastrophically higher. In practical language, as one New York owner quipped about compliance at a seminar: “I’d rather pay the cleaning invoice every quarter than be explaining to the fire marshal why I didn’t.”

New York’s restaurant scene is famously fast-paced and ever-changing, but some truths never change. In this new “cost-cutting” era, owners can still rely on time-tested practices: keep exhaust systems clean to bare metal, maintain access panels, test interlocks regularly, and log everything. Those will serve them better in the long run than any temporary fee reduction. The city’s approach now is to make it easier to do the paperwork, but the price of safety has already been negotiated in real life – it’s simply part of the cost of staying open in New York City. A wise operator knows that the small sums saved on a permit today are quickly overshadowed by the mountain of costs – both financial and human – that come from a preventable kitchen fire. In the words of a long-time Filta Kleen veteran, “At the end of the day, the equipment we install and service is there to save the restaurant; not just its food, but its whole business.”

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