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Caring for Closed Kitchens

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Many kitchens nationwide are quiet as mandated shelter-in-place orders keep many foodservice operations closed. Some may not reopen for months. Facing lengthy closures, operators should make sure to properly maintain equipment so it's in good condition for reopening. Chris Evans, service manager for Gary's East Coast Service (<https://www.garyseast.com/>) in Oxford, Conn., shares best practices for keeping equipment safe and clean.

1. **Empty your fryers.** If your fryer will be offline for some time, Evans says, empty the fryer and dispose of the oil.
2. **Drain combi ovens.** Most models will drain their water automatically when they're shut off, but some require an operator to manually turn the valves to drain them. Either way, Evans advises these ovens be entirely drained, their components cleaned and compartment doors left open so gaskets won't stick during prolonged periods of dormancy.
3. **Turn out the (pilot) lights.** Extinguish the pilot lights on steam tables, ovens, and especially range-top burners if the kitchen will be empty for a while. "If those range-top pilot lights get blown out or someone leaves the valve open a little ways, it could sit and dump gas, which would be a real problem if no one's there for a while," Evans says. His advice: "Turn the gas off entirely."
4. **Descale and delime.** Now is the time to get ahead of maintenance on equipment like steamers, dishwashers and ice machines, doing deep cleanings that descale and delime their surfaces.
5. **Consolidate refrigerators.** As closures stretch on, Evans suggests operators move refrigerated or frozen items from reach-in refrigerators to walk-ins. This not only saves electricity but frees up those smaller units for cleaning. Remember to leave the refrigerators' doors open to keep them dry after cleaning.
6. **Get online safely.** Once your kitchen can reopen, take your time restarting equipment. Turn the gas back on and relight pilot lights, keeping in mind that air might have built up in the lines and will need to be blown out before the pilots can be relit. "When you first turn stuff on, it might look like it's smoking but more than likely it's not. That's just condensation burning off," Evans says. "But if you're unsure of firing everything back up, it's probably a wise choice to have [a service tech] come in and do it for you."