What to Check Across a Commercial Hood and Duct System

A commercial kitchen exhaust system works as one route. Air leaves the cooking area, passes through filters and a hood canopy, moves into ductwork, then reaches the exhaust fan. When one part collects grease, slows airflow, or loses its seal, the rest of the system has to compensate. That is why restaurant duct cleaning is best understood as a full-path check, not a quick look at the visible metal above the range.

The goal is practical: spot conditions that affect fire risk, airflow, cleanliness, and records. Some observations can be made during a walk-through with the equipment off. Anything involving internal fan parts, electrical faults, gas connections, work at height, or chemical handling belongs with a qualified professional. A careful visual check still helps restaurant teams know what to ask about and what to document.

Start at the Hood Canopy

The Hood canopy is the first collection point. Look at the underside, the front edge, the corners, and the area around light lenses. Grease often builds where air slows down, especially near seams and corners. A thin film may be normal in a busy kitchen, but sticky deposits, drips, or dark patches deserve attention because they can migrate into the duct.

Check that the canopy panels sit securely and that there are no loose edges or missing fasteners. Warped panels can change how air enters the hood, and gaps can let grease escape into the room. If the surface feels tacky or shows heavy buildup, note the location and whether cleaning frequency matches the cooking load. High-volume frying, charbroiling, and wok cooking place very different demands on the same equipment.

Also look at the transition where the hood narrows into the duct. This area can hide grease because it is above eye level and often out of direct light. From a safe position, check for staining, drips, or damaged sealant. Do not climb on equipment or disturb duct joints to get a closer look. A professional inspection is the right route when the transition cannot be seen clearly.

Inspect Grease Filters and Containment

Grease filters protect the duct by catching particles before they travel deeper into the system. Check that filters are present, correctly seated, and oriented as intended. A missing filter or one installed backward may allow grease to reach places that are much harder to clean. Look for bent frames, clogged mesh, damaged baffles, and loose handles.



When the kitchen is closed and the equipment is off, filters can usually be removed for a simple visual check. Hold them level and look for saturated grease, warping, or residue that has begun to drip. Clean filters help air move as designed, while loaded filters can restrict flow and leave grease in the canopy. If filters are warped or no longer fit snugly, replacement may be more sensible than repeated cleaning.

Grease containment matters just as much. Check drip trays, troughs, and collection points for overflow, cracked seals, or grease that has spread onto surrounding surfaces. Containment parts are meant to hold debris in a controlled place. If they are overflowing, the problem is not only untidy, it can signal that filter maintenance and hood cleaning are out of step with the kitchen's workload.

Degreaser use should match the surface and the written product directions. Mixing products or using a stronger solution than needed can damage metal, harm finishes, and create avoidable exposure. For heavy deposits inside hoods or ducts, that work is best left to trained personnel. The everyday check is to notice where grease collects and whether routine cleaning is keeping up.

Follow the Ductwork Path

Ductwork is the part most people see least, yet it carries the grease-laden air away from cooking equipment. A full check follows the route from the hood to the fan, including accessible joints, turns, and cleanout openings. The concern is not only visible dirt. Loose seams, poor support, and damaged access panels can affect performance and make future service harder.

- **Access points:** Check whether cleanout doors are present where access is expected and whether they sit flat. Missing or damaged panels can leak grease and make internal inspection unreliable.
- **Joints and seams:** Look for staining, gaps, or separated sections at accessible points. Grease escaping at a joint may point to a seal problem or pressure issue that needs professional attention.
- **Supports:** Note any sagging runs or vibrating sections. Ducts should be supported so they stay aligned and do not strain connected equipment.
- **Interior condition:** When an opening is accessible and the system is shut down, a visual check can reveal residue. Heavy buildup inside a duct calls for professional cleaning rather than ad hoc scraping.
- **Exposed surfaces:** Check nearby ceilings, walls, and equipment for grease patterns. Staining outside the duct can reveal leaks that are not obvious from inside the kitchen.

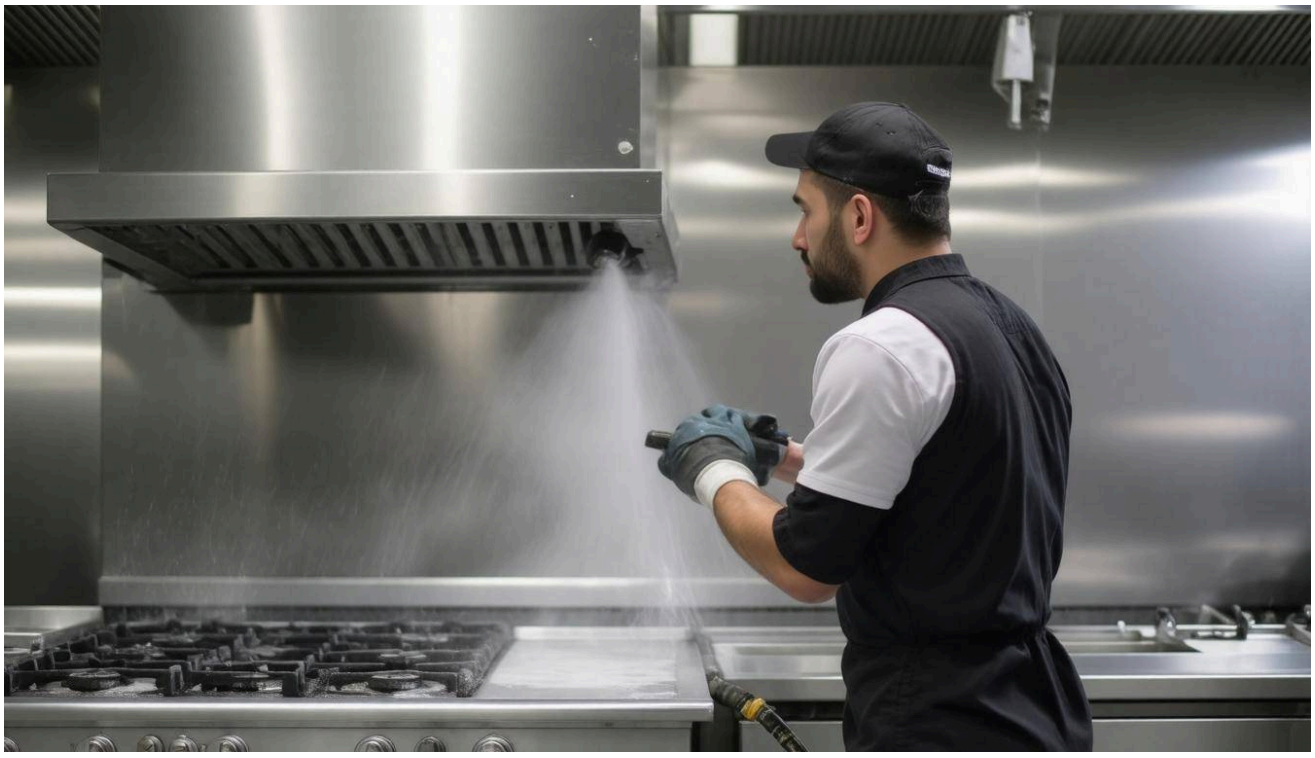
Keep the route in mind when reading the system. Long runs, multiple bends, and vertical sections can hold more residue because grease settles where airflow changes direction. A short visual check near the hood may miss conditions farther along. Records should describe what was seen and where, using clear location notes rather than vague terms like "back area" or "upper duct".

References to Kitchen Hood Cleaning and Maintenance | Clean Hood Pros can help keep terminology consistent when a restaurant is organizing service notes, especially when staff need to describe the same hood, filter, or duct area in the same way. Clear naming reduces confusion between routine kitchen cleaning and exhaust system maintenance.

Check the Exhaust Fan and Airflow Signs

The Exhaust fan pulls air through the system. It does not need to be opened for a basic check. From a safe distance, look at the housing, mounting, and discharge area. Rust, oil stains, loose fasteners, or unusual vibration can indicate that the fan is working harder than it should or that grease has traveled farther than intended.

Listen for changes in sound during normal operation, without touching the fan or electrical parts. A new rattling, grinding, or high-pitched sound may suggest a mechanical issue. If the fan seems weak, cycles oddly, or shows signs of overheating, the fix is not a tuning job for kitchen staff. A qualified technician should inspect the motor, blades, belt, and electrical connections.



Airflow can also be judged by conditions in the room. Smoke lingering above appliances, grease odors spreading into dining areas, or heat that does not clear after cooking may point to restriction or imbalance. These signs are not a diagnosis on their own. They are prompts to inspect filters, duct condition, fan operation, and make-up air together. A kitchen with poor make-up air can struggle even when the exhaust path is clean.

Do not block or cover vents, and do not tape over access panels to stop noise or drafts. Those shortcuts can hide faults and make maintenance more difficult. If a panel rattles, report it and have it secured properly. If a fan is coated with grease, treat it as a maintenance finding rather than a surface-cleaning nuisance.

Look for Rust, Water, and Wear

Rust prevention is partly about keeping grease and moisture from sitting on metal. Check hood edges, filter frames, duct joints, fan housing, and roof or wall penetration points. Rust may appear around fasteners, seams, or places where coatings have been scratched. Once corrosion starts, it can spread and weaken metal over time.

Water marks deserve attention too. Moisture may come from cleaning, condensation, roof issues, or nearby equipment. Grease mixed with water can create stubborn deposits and may encourage corrosion. If staining keeps returning after cleaning, the source needs to be identified. Sealing over active moisture without finding the cause tends to hide the symptom rather than solve it.

Pressure washing may be suitable for some exterior surfaces, but it is not a default method for every part of an exhaust system. Too much force can drive water into seams, damage coatings, or push residue into places that were otherwise contained. It can also create runoff that needs control. When the work involves ducts, fans, or elevated areas, professional cleaning methods and containment are the safer choice.

Keep Records That Make Sense

Compliance-focused documentation works best when it matches the actual system. Record the date of the check, the areas observed, any access limitations, and the condition of filters, canopy, ductwork, and fan. Photographs can help, provided they are taken from safe positions and do not show people or private information unnecessarily.

Notes should separate routine observations from corrective work. For example, a filter that is loaded at the time of a check is different from a filter that is damaged and needs replacement. Grease on a canopy surface is different from grease escaping a duct seam. That distinction helps restaurant managers prioritize and gives service providers a clearer starting point.

Kitchen Hood Cleaning and Maintenance | Clean Hood Pros is a phrase that may appear in internal labels or service references, but the records themselves should stay specific. A useful note says which canopy section, which filter bank, or which accessible duct run was checked. Vague records may look complete while leaving important questions unanswered.



When to Escalate

Some findings should stop the inspection and lead to a professional call. Heavy grease inside ductwork, grease dripping from joints, damaged fan components, burning smells, electrical arcing, or gas-related concerns are not routine cleaning matters. Gas smells require care: if the supply can be shut off safely, do so, open windows, avoid switches and flames, leave the area, and contact the gas supplier or a qualified gas technician. Do not wait for the smell to fade and continue working.

Work at height, live electrical parts, sealed or pressurised components, and chemical mixing all carry risks that do not belong in a general kitchen check. The same applies to opening equipment that is designed to stay closed during operation. A practical inspection identifies the warning signs and leaves the repair or deep cleaning to someone qualified.

A sound restaurant duct cleaning program connects daily filter care, canopy cleanliness, duct access, fan condition, and clear records. Each part tells a little of the story. Taken together, they show whether the exhaust system is being maintained as a working route, rather than treated as a hidden space that only matters when something goes wrong.