How Much Does Professional Hood Cleaning Cost? A Guide for Restaurant Owners

Running a commercial kitchen means juggling dozens of daily tasks, from prep to plating to closing out the register. One job that rarely makes the daily checklist but can sink your operation if ignored is cleaning the exhaust hood. I learned this firsthand years ago when a routine fire inspection turned into a shutdown notice because my hood filters were caked with grease. That single event cost me two days of revenue and a rushed, expensive emergency cleaning. Since then, I have made professional hood cleaning a non-negotiable part of my maintenance budget. If you are wondering what this service costs and why it matters, here is a realistic breakdown.

Why the Price Varies So Much

There is no flat rate for professional hood cleaning. The price depends on your kitchen's size, layout, and how much grease has built up. A small cafe with a single hood canopy and a short run of ductwork might pay a few hundred dollars per cleaning. A busy restaurant with a long ventilation system, multiple hoods, and complex ductwork can easily spend over a thousand dollars each time. I have seen quotes range from $250 for a basic once-over to more than $2,500 for a full kitchen exhaust cleaning in a high-volume diner.

Most contractors base their estimates on the linear feet of the hood canopy and the length of the ductwork. They also factor in the number of grease filters, the type of fire suppression system, and whether they need to bring in scaffolding or a lift to reach the ductwork. If your kitchen has a centrifugal fan on the roof, that adds time and labor because the fan blades must be scraped clean to restore airflow. A thorough job also includes cleaning the interior of the hood canopy, the exhaust plenum, and the entire duct path from the hood to the exterior vent. Every bend and joint traps grease, so the more complex the run, the higher the price.



What You Are Actually Paying For

Professional hood cleaning is not just scrubbing metal until it shines. It is a process that involves degreasing, pressure washing, and often steam cleaning to remove hardened deposits. The crew will remove each grease filter and soak it in a hot chemical bath before pressure washing it. They will scrape the interior of the hood canopy and the ductwork, sometimes using hand tools to break up layers of carbonized grease. Then they will rinse everything with a high-pressure washer and reassemble the system. A good contractor also checks the fire suppression system, making sure the fusible links are intact and the nozzles are aimed correctly. They will clean the fire extinguisher cabinet and verify that the kitchen exhaust cleaning meets NFPA 96 standards. NFPA 96 is the national standard for ventilation control and fire protection in commercial cooking equipment. Your local restaurant fire code likely requires compliance with it, and your insurance company may too.

One detail that surprised me early on is that not all cleaning companies are equal. Some do a surface-level wipe and call it done. Others go deep, removing access panels and cleaning every inch of the ductwork. The difference shows up during a fire inspection or, worse, a kitchen fire. I once watched a fire inspector run a gloved finger along the inside of a duct after a so-called cleaning. When it came back greasy, the restaurant was cited on the spot. That is why I now only hire companies that follow UL 1047 standards for the cleaning process. UL 1047 is an industry standard for the safe and effective cleaning of commercial kitchen exhaust systems. It ensures that the cleaning method does not damage the equipment and that all grease is removed, not just pushed around.

Frequency and Scheduling

How often you need professional hood cleaning depends on how much you cook and what you cook. A high-volume steakhouse that runs the grill all day and night may need a cleaning every three months. A deli that mostly uses a flat top and a fryer might get away with every six months. NFPA 96 actually specifies cleaning intervals based on the type of cooking and volume. For example, systems serving solid-fuel cooking (like wood-fired ovens) require monthly cleaning. Most grease-heavy kitchens fall into a quarterly or bi-annual schedule. I recommend asking your cleaning contractor to set up a regular cleaning schedule and to keep a log of each service. That log becomes your proof during inspections.

One thing I have learned the hard way is to never let the cleaning interval slide during busy seasons. Grease buildup accelerates when you are running the hood longer and harder. If you skip a cleaning, the next one will cost more because the deposits are thicker and harder to remove. The contractor may also need to use more aggressive chemicals or spend extra time on the ductwork. That is how a $400 cleaning turns into an $800 cleaning. And if your fire suppression system gets blocked by grease, the cost of a false fire alarm or an actual fire is many times higher.



Hidden Costs and Trade-Offs

There are a few costs that restaurant owners often overlook. First, you may need to shut down part of your kitchen during the cleaning. The crew needs access to the hood and ductwork, so you cannot run the exhaust while they work. That means no cooking under that hood for

several hours. Plan your cleaning during a slow period or on a day off. Second, if your ductwork is old or poorly maintained, the cleaning crew may discover damage like rust, holes, or loose seams. Repairing that ductwork can add hundreds or thousands of dollars to the job. I have seen contractors refuse to clean a duct that is too corroded because the cleaning process itself could cause a collapse. In that case, you need a duct repair before you can get back in compliance.

Another trade-off is choosing between a local independent cleaner and a national chain. The local crew may be cheaper and more flexible on scheduling, but they might not have the same equipment or insurance coverage. The national chain costs more but brings scaffolding, industrial pressure washers, and a documented process that meets NFPA 96 and UL 1047. I have used both. For routine quarterly cleanings, a good local company that I trust works fine. For the annual deep clean, I pay extra for the big outfit that brings a full crew and leaves the system spotless. My insurance company actually gave me a small discount when I showed them the cleaning records from the national provider. That discount offset part of the higher cost.

What to Look for in a Contractor

When you call for quotes, ask specific questions. Do they clean the ductwork all the way to the roof? Do they remove and clean the centrifugal fan? Do they check the fire suppression system and recharge it if needed? Do they provide a certificate of cleaning that shows compliance with NFPA 96? A reputable company will answer yes to all of these. They should also carry general liability and workers' compensation insurance. If a cleaner gets hurt on your property and they are not insured, you could be liable. I always ask for a copy of their insurance certificate before the first cleaning.

Look for a company that uses environmentally safe degreasers. Some cleaners still use harsh solvents that can damage the hood's finish and create fumes in the kitchen. A good contractor will use products that are effective but safe for the equipment and the staff. I have seen Earth's Pride branded degreasers used by several reputable companies. They are biodegradable and work well on heavy grease without leaving a toxic residue. That matters if your kitchen is open during cleaning or if you have staff working nearby.



The Bottom Line

Professional hood cleaning is not an expense you can afford to skip. The cost is a fraction of what a kitchen fire or a health department fine would cost you. A typical cleaning for a medium-sized restaurant runs between $400 and $800, but the range goes higher for large or complex systems. The key is to build it into your operating budget and stick to a cleaning schedule that matches your cooking volume. Every time I have tried to cut corners on this, it has cost me more in the long run. A clean hood runs more efficiently, reduces the risk of fire, and keeps the inspectors happy. If you have not had a professional hood cleaning in the last six months, now is the time to call a contractor and get on their calendar. Your kitchen ventilation safety depends on it.