

Ever have a sneaking suspicion that your walk-in might not be that secure. That perhaps it is costing you more than it should? You could be right. Your walk-in may not be protected against infiltration! Sure, you watch your inventory so it doesn't go out the back door but do you think about the fact that it costs you money each time the walk-in door is opened? How about when it's propped open during deliveries or during that dinner rush? This month we'll revisit a tried 'n true energy-saving technology that most restaurateurs know about but often fail to implement – walk-in strip curtains.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

We know that strip curtains are under-utilized because the engineers at the Food Service Technology Center visit a couple of hundred kitchens a year and the majority of these do not have strip curtains or plastic swing doors on their walk-in boxes. We suspect that operators view strip curtains as more of a nuisance than an asset. The truth is that strip curtains and plastic doors save energy, which saves you money! Let's review the evidence and see how strip curtains protect your profits.

THE SECRET OF REFRIGERATION

Before we go any further, let's revisit the one small piece of refrigeration theory that is necessary to understand the importance of strip curtains: refrigeration is NOT about putting cold into your walk-in box, it's all about removing heat from the box and your kitchen is full of heat! Every time you open the walk-in door, warm, moist air sneaks into the box and then you have to spend your money removing the heat from that air. In your freezer, the moisture ends up as frost, requiring you to spend money on defrosting. We energy sleuths call that warm, moist air "infiltration", which is a fitting name – visualize a shady character infiltrating your kitchen and quietly siphoning off your profits. Installing strip curtains or plastic swing doors on your walk-in is an effective way to block infiltration.

AN OFFER YOU CAN'T REFUSE

It is difficult to estimate typical energy savings from installing strip curtains on walk-in refrigerators because there are too many variables but we can estimate the upfront cost, which turns out to be a pretty good deal. Strip curtains for a typical walk-in door run about \$150 and plastic swing doors, usually used on larger boxes, are about twice that amount. Most of the power companies in California offer rebates for strip curtains and plastic doors that pay almost \$90 for a typical 4-foot by 7-foot unit. So, a strip curtain only ends up costing about \$60, an investment that you will quickly recoup, and you will get the added benefit of keeping a lot of moisture out of your box. Just like the firewall on your computer, or the lock on the beer cooler, the strip curtain is a security device that you cannot afford to ignore. Think of strip curtains and plastic doors as insurance for all those times that the walk-in doors are propped open!

These energy saving tips are offered by the Food Service Technology Center (FSTC), an unbiased food service resource center located in San Ramon, CA and funded by California utility ratepayers under the auspices of the California Public Utilities Commission. For more information on the FSTC and for our schedule of free energy efficiency seminars, please visit our website at www.Fishnick.com.