STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

Restaurant Cash Handling SOP

Document no.	SOP-RST-003
Revision	1.0
Owner	General Manager
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Review cycle	Every 12 months

1. Purpose

To handle restaurant cash accurately and securely throughout the shift, reducing errors, theft risk and unexplained discrepancies.

2. Scope

Applies to all cash handled at server, cashier and bar drawers during a shift, including mid-shift drops and tip payouts. Opening float setup and closing reconciliation are covered by the opening and closing checklist SOPs.

Definitions

Cash float	The starting amount of cash placed in a drawer at the start of a shift so change can be made.
Safe drop	Removing cash above a set limit from a drawer during a shift and securing it in the safe.
Discrepancy	A difference between the cash counted in a drawer and the amount the POS system expects.

3. Responsibilities

Server	Collects cash payments accurately, gives correct change, and reports any discrepancy immediately.
Bartender	Handles cash at the bar drawer and completes mid-shift safe drops when the drawer nears its limit.
Shift Manager	Authorizes safe drops, holds the safe combination or key, and investigates any reported discrepancy.
General Manager	Sets cash handling policy, drawer limits, and reviews discrepancy trends.

RACI matrix

Activity	Server	Bartender	Shift Manager	General Manager
Collect payment and give correct change	R	R	A	I
Perform a mid-shift safe drop	R	R	A	I
Report a cash discrepancy	R	R	A	I
Investigate a reported	C	C	R/A	I

Activity	Server	Bartender	Shift Manager	General Manager
discrepancy				
Set cash handling policy and drawer limits	I	I	C	R/A

R = Responsible, A = Accountable, C = Consulted, I = Informed

4. Materials and PPE

Materials, tools and systems

- POS system with cash drawer
- Safe drop bags and log
- Cash counting mat or tray
- Drawer variance report
- Discrepancy report form

5. Procedure

Step	Task	Owner	Done
5.1	**Verify the starting float at drawer handoff** Before taking over a drawer mid-shift, count the float with the outgoing staff member present and confirm it matches the amount on the handoff slip.	Server	☐
5.2	**Ring every transaction through the POS** Enter every cash sale into the POS at the time of the transaction so the system total always matches what should be in the drawer. **Warning:** Never accept cash for an item without ringing it into the POS, even for a quick or small sale.	Server	☐
5.3	**Count change back to the guest** Count change back to the guest out loud, starting from the sale total up to the amount tendered, before closing the drawer.	Server	☐
5.4	**Keep the drawer closed between transactions** Close the cash drawer immediately after completing a transaction and never leave it open or unattended, even briefly. **Warning:** Never leave a cash drawer open or unattended while stepping away from the register.	Server	☐
5.5	**Watch for the drawer approaching its limit** Monitor the cash total in the drawer during the shift and flag the shift manager once it approaches the limit set by house policy for a safe drop.	Bartender	☐
5.6	**Perform a mid-shift safe drop** With the shift manager present, count the cash to be dropped, place it in a sealed safe drop bag with the amount and drawer noted, and log it before it goes into the safe. **Checkpoint:** Every safe drop bag is logged with the amount, drawer, time and both staff members' initials.	Bartender	☐
5.7	**Handle large bills carefully** Check large denomination bills against house policy for verification, and place them in a lower section of the drawer rather than leaving them on top.	Server	☐

Step	Task	Owner	Done
5.8	**Process a void or refund correctly** Get shift manager approval before voiding a transaction or refunding cash, and record the reason in the POS so the drawer total stays explainable.	Server	☐
5.9	**Handle cash tip payouts** Pay out cash tips from the designated tip fund rather than the sales drawer, and have the receiving staff member sign the tip payout log.	Shift Manager	☐
5.10	**Report a suspected discrepancy immediately** If a count during the shift does not match the expected POS total, tell the shift manager right away rather than waiting until the end of the shift. **Checkpoint:** Any discrepancy found during the shift is reported to the shift manager the same day.	Server	☐
5.11	**Investigate and document a discrepancy** The shift manager reviews the POS log, drawer counts and safe drop records to identify the likely cause, and documents the finding on the discrepancy report form.	Shift Manager	☐
5.12	**Review discrepancy trends** The general manager reviews discrepancy reports periodically to spot patterns by drawer, shift or staff member, and updates training or policy as needed.	General Manager	☐

6. Quality checks

- Every cash sale is rung into the POS at the time of the transaction.
- Safe drops are logged with the amount, time and two staff members' initials.
- Discrepancies are reported the same shift they are found, not left until closing.
- Voids and refunds show a documented reason and manager approval.

7. Records

- Safe drop log
- Discrepancy report form
- Tip payout log
- POS void and refund report

8. KPIs

- Total cash discrepancy amount per week
- Number of discrepancies per drawer per month
- Average time between drawer approaching limit and safe drop
- Void and refund rate as a percent of transactions

9. Common mistakes

- Leaving a cash drawer open or unattended between transactions.
- Letting a drawer build up well past the safe drop limit before dropping it.
- Waiting until the end of the shift to report a suspected discrepancy.
- Paying tips out of the sales drawer instead of the designated tip fund.

10. Revision history

Revision	Date	Description	Reviewed by
1.0	September 15, 2026	Initial release	Alexa Uskova

Approval

Prepared by	Approved by	Date

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