Pressure Washing or Manual Scrubbing for Difficult Exhaust Grease

Grease in a commercial kitchen exhaust system is not just surface dirt. It collects where vapor, oil, and heat travel, then cools into a sticky layer that can hold dust and debris. On a hood canopy, the problem may be visible at the edges. Inside ductwork or around an exhaust fan, it may only become clear during a proper inspection. That is why the choice between pressure washing and manual scrubbing is not simply about which method feels stronger. It depends on where the grease sits, what surface is being cleaned, and what level of documentation the kitchen needs.

Professional hood cleaning for restaurants usually combines several methods rather than relying on one. The exhaust path is a system: canopy, filters, ducts, fan, and the areas where grease is meant to be contained. A method that works well on a removable metal part may be wrong for a seam, a motor housing, or a tight transition. The practical question is where each approach fits, and where it creates avoidable risk.

What pressure washing does well

Pressure washing uses a narrow stream of water to dislodge deposits from hard surfaces. On open, washable areas such as a metal hood canopy or removable components, it can remove loose grease quickly after a suitable degreaser has done the work of breaking down the film. Heat and water can make heavy deposits easier to shift, which is why this approach is often associated with commercial kitchen exhaust cleaning.

The strength of pressure washing is coverage on exposed surfaces. It reaches the texture of metal, corners of a canopy, and areas where wiping alone leaves a smear. It also helps rinse residue away, which matters because cleaning product left behind can attract new grime. In the right setting, it is efficient and consistent.

The limits are just as clear. Water under pressure can drive grease into seams, cavities, or places that were not meant to hold moisture. It can strip coatings, disturb caulking, damage electrical parts, or push residue toward areas that are harder to reach afterward. Around an exhaust fan, care is needed to keep water away from motors, wiring, and bearings. Any fault involving power, switches, or electrical housings is a job for a qualified professional, not a cleanup task for someone with a sprayer.



Pressure washing also does not prove that the whole exhaust path is clean. A bright canopy can create a false sense of completion while grease remains deeper in the ductwork. For restaurants, that distinction matters because inspection and records often focus on the system as a whole, not only the parts that are easy to see.

Where manual scrubbing earns its place

Manual scrubbing is slower, but it gives more control. It suits edges, seams, handles, filter frames, and spots where grease has built up in layers. A brush or pad can work along a joint without sending water into a hidden space. On greasy filters, controlled scrubbing can lift deposits from mesh and frames while keeping the shape of the part intact. It is also useful when a surface needs to be checked closely as it is cleaned, since the operator can feel rough spots, loose fasteners, or damage that a spray stream would simply wash past.

Manual work has its own drawbacks. It is physically demanding, easy to rush, and dependent on careful attention. A person may clean the visible face of a part while missing the back or the narrow channel where grease gathers. Without a clear sequence, one area may be scrubbed

twice while another is barely touched. That is why professional hood cleaning often uses manual scrubbing as a targeted method, not as the only response to a heavily loaded system.

Chemicals are part of both approaches. A degreaser can soften grease so that scrubbing or rinsing works with less force. The right product depends on the surface and the type of residue. Strong products can harm finishes, leave odors, or create slippery floors if they are handled carelessly. Mixing products is not a shortcut and can create hazardous conditions, so product directions and safety information should be followed. Where ventilation is poor or fumes are noticeable, the work should be left to trained personnel.

The real comparison: force, control, and access

The choice is less about pressure washing versus scrubbing as rivals and more about matching the method to the job. Pressure washing is strong on exposed, water-tolerant surfaces. Manual scrubbing is better where control matters. Access often decides the issue before either method is chosen. Grease inside a duct may require disassembly, containment, and safe access, not a longer spray wand or a stiffer brush. Work at height and work around energized equipment should be handled by qualified professionals.

Think about what happens after the grease loosens. A cleaning method is only useful if the loosened material is captured and removed. Pressure can move residue into a drain, onto the floor, or behind a panel. Scrubbing can leave slurry in corners if it is not collected. Good grease containment protects the kitchen and nearby areas from runoff, and it helps keep the work from becoming a bigger cleanup than the original problem.



A practical way to weigh the options is to look at four points:

- Surface: hard metal and washable parts may tolerate pressure, while seams and delicate finishes usually need a lighter touch.
- Location: open canopy areas are simpler than duct interiors, fan components, or hidden transitions.
- Residue: loose grease rinses differently from baked, layered deposits that need dwell time and agitation.
- Documentation: if the kitchen needs records, the work should cover the agreed scope and be described accurately afterward.

That last point is easy to overlook. A restaurant may need proof that service covered the expected areas and addressed grease where it collects. Cleaning every part of the hood system takes more than making one surface look better. It requires a scope that includes the canopy, grease filters, ductwork, fan, and related containment points, with attention to access and safe handling. The method used in each area should support that scope rather than replace it.

When pressure washing suits the job

Pressure washing is a good fit when the target is a durable, accessible surface that can get wet without creating a hazard. A removable filter frame or a canopy face may respond well when grease is loose and the surrounding area is protected. It can also be useful after a degreaser has been applied and given time to work, provided the rinse stays where it is intended.

It is less suitable when water could enter electrical parts, collect in a cavity, or carry grease into a place that cannot be cleaned. It is also a poor substitute for inspecting the exhaust path. If the job involves an exhaust fan with grease on internal parts, the safe answer is not to aim harder. The fan and related components need to be handled by someone qualified to work around the equipment.

When scrubbing is the better fit

Scrubbing suits detailed work. It is useful around filter frames, canopy edges, seams, and small deposits that a spray stream might miss. It allows the cleaner to stop, check, and repeat in a controlled way. This matters in commercial kitchens where grease can collect at joints and transitions, not only on broad flat panels.

Manual scrubbing is not automatically safer or more complete. It can be uneven, and it may not reach inside a duct without the right access. It also depends on proper product use and safe handling of runoff. When deposits are heavy or spread through the exhaust path,

scrubbing alone can become slow and incomplete. At that point, a planned service approach is more useful than choosing one tool and forcing every part of the job to fit it.



Making the decision for a busy kitchen

For a general reader, the simplest judgment is this: use pressure where water and force are safe, use scrubbing where detail and control are needed, and treat hidden or technical parts as a separate task. The best outcome is not the shiniest hood canopy. It is an exhaust system that has been cleaned according to its layout, with grease removed from the places where it would otherwise build up.

Professional hood cleaning is built around that broader view. It considers the whole path, the condition of the parts, and the records that show what was addressed. Pressure washing and manual scrubbing both have a role, but neither works well as a stand-alone answer to difficult exhaust grease. When the grease is heavy, widespread, or inside equipment that needs special access, the job belongs with qualified professionals who can manage the work safely and document the scope clearly.

Before choosing a method, look at the grease itself. Is it a thin film on a washable surface, a sticky layer around a filter, or a deposit deep in the ductwork? Each answer points to a different approach. That simple check prevents the common mistake of judging the whole system by the easiest surface to see. Cleaning every part of the hood system means treating the visible areas and the hidden ones as one connected job, with the right method used in each place.