

Do You Need a Bin or Dispenser for Your Commercial Ice Machine? 

BY FSW STAFF ON JULY 28, 2015

GUIDE TO ICE MACHINES, RESTAURANT KITCHEN TOOLS &amp; EQUIPMENT



Modular commercial ice machines do not have built-in storage, so the ice that is produced has nowhere to go unless the machine is attached to a storage bin or ice dispenser. The type and size of ice storage you need depends on your specific food service establishment, the size of your modular ice machine and how much ice is used in a day.

## Ice Storage Bins

Ice storage bins are used in restaurants or other food service establishments that need large quantities of ice at various times throughout the day. The **ice storage bins** act as ice depositories from which employees scoop ice into **ice buckets** or **ice totes** to carry elsewhere as needed.

## Features

Here are some basic features that all ice storage bins share in common:

- **Storage.** Ice storage bins can store several hundred to several thousands of pounds of ice.
- **Stainless steel.** Ice storage bins have stainless steel exteriors to withstand the rigors of food service environments.
- **Doors.** The bins may also have access hatches or pouch-style doors, depending on the size and style of the bin.
- **Insulation.** The interiors are insulated but not refrigerated, so ice will slowly melt throughout the day.
- **Drains.** Floor drains allow excess water to drain out of the bin so the ice does not freeze into one big block.

*Sizing Tip: Your ice storage bin should hold at least as much or 10 – 20% more ice than your commercial ice machine can produce. After all, if you purchase an ice machine based on production, then it makes sense to have enough room to store all of it at once. This will also assure that you do not run out of ice in the middle of a rush.*

## Additional Considerations

Health departments require restaurant workers to scoop ice from the bin with a dedicated **ice scoop**. Additionally, there should be a dedicated **ice scoop holder** to keep the scoop from sitting in the ice itself, reducing the risk of cross-contamination. » [Learn more about Safe Ice Handling](#)

## Hotel Ice Dispensers

Experts recommend that hotels allot five pounds of half-cube ice per room, and size their ice machine accordingly, and guests dispense their own ice via a specialized **hotel ice dispenser**. Multi-story hotels usually have one ice dispenser per floor, sometimes multiple units per floor. Multiple units per floor may be needed in larger hotels.

## Features

Though there are slight differences between the brands, each hotel ice dispenser shares some of the same general features.

- **Ice filling station.** The ice fill station can accommodate a standard size hotel ice bucket.
- **Dispensing system.** Ice is dispensed either by pushing a lever with the bucket or pushing a button by hand.
- **Fast dispensing.** The fastest units dispense ice at a rate of 1/4 pound per minute, so cups and buckets are filled quickly.
- **Options.** There are optional coin- and token-operated features to assure that only hotel guests have access to the ice.

*Sizing Tip: The largest hotel ice dispensers can only store about 300 pounds of ice and are at most 30 inches wide. Anything bigger would not fit into a typical hotel because of doorway and corridor sizes. This means the dispenser cannot serve every room simultaneously. Still, the larger your ice machine, the larger the dispenser storage capacity should be. So, if you need 800 or more pounds of ice on a particular floor, opt for the largest-capacity dispenser you can find or consider using multiple hotel ice dispensers on each floor.*

## Countertop Ice Dispensers

**Countertop ice dispensers** dispense ice and sometimes drinking water. They are found primarily in employee break rooms or injury-treatment facilities. Regardless, this type of unit functions when ice is poured into the storage compartment or when a modular ice machine is attached directly on top.

## Features

Listed below are some of the features shared by all countertop ice dispensers:

- **Small footprint.** A compact footprint maximizes available countertop space.
- **Cup dispensing.** Countertop ice dispensers can only dispense ice into cups, as opposed to ice buckets.
- **Lever system.** Push-lever or electronic eyes activate these dispensers, reducing the risk of cross-contamination.

*Sizing Tip: As with hotel ice dispensers, countertop ice dispensers can only hold a few hundred pounds of ice at most. To assure that there is enough ice to go around during busy periods (like during an employee lunch break) consider how many people will use the break room at once. Estimate that each person will use 1.5 pounds of ice, and size your dispenser accordingly.*

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