

Reasons for Cleaning and Disinfection

Food safety management systems often place HACCP at the centre of control for specific food hazards. This makes sense particularly where a specific hazard linked to adverse impacts for the consumer can be identified. However, no matter how robust the HACCP system may be it requires a sound program of basic controls that address general hazards, many of which may not be identified. These programs are described as Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), Pre-requisite Programs (PRP) and Control Points (CP) to name a few. Regardless of the term used they all represent the basic requirement for good practice to provide a safe environment for the manufacture of food. Among the most important of these is the need to clean and sanitize your plant and equipment sufficient to produce food free of physical, allergenic, chemical and microbiological hazards. In addition, it is important that employees understand the reasons why a food plant must be cleaned. Simply instructing people is seldom enough to maintain high standards – they must also understand the reasons why, including:

- To reduce the risks from food hazards – food poisoning and foreign body contamination
- To comply with local and international legislation
- To meet specific customer requirements, e.g. Supermarkets
- To meet the requirements of Global Food Safety Standards (GFSS)
- To maintain positive audit and inspection outcomes
- To allow maximum plant productivity
- To present a hygienic visual image
- To promote safe working conditions for staff, contractors and visitors
- To maintain product shelf-life
- To avoid pest infestation.

At the most basic level, the visual appearance of a food factory is an indication of the standards and culture of the company.

It has a strong impact on the perception of an auditor or visitor and can influence the overall outcome of audits and securing new business. For this reason, the visual cleanliness of a company is as important as detailed HACCP plans. Cleaning costs money. It is often perceived as a necessary evil which does not add value to a product directly. The cost of cleaning and indeed the cost of not cleaning are seldom measured routinely by food companies. The typical cost elements of a cleaning programme include:

- Labour and supervision
- Water supply, treatment and purchase

- Water heating
- Cleaning equipment
- Chemicals
- Corrosion
- Monitoring
- Effluent
- Downtime Basic Microbiology for Quality Managers

Of these, labour is normally the biggest factor accounting for over 60% of the total cleaning budget whether resourced under contract or in-house. When cost pressures come to bare, usually labour is normally cut back. While this may save money in the short term, over time it will lead to a number of indirect costs including a reduction in shelf life, increase in product complaints, recalls, regulatory restriction and a loss of business. The viability of the business will ultimately be impacted. The next most significant costs are water and chemicals which can vary depending on the source and supplier.