

Cleaning cloth management



Cloths are widely used during cleaning and sometimes for sanitizing in the food industry, it is therefore very important to clean, maintain and dispose of cleaning cloths when necessary or as required. Dirty cloths can spread bacteria in food manufacturing factories (especially preparation areas). Bacteria could easily spread to food contact areas especially if employees do not follow basic hygiene practices.

Cleaning cloths are a potential source of cross contamination within a food manufacturing environment therefore it is important to avoid the use of cut off's (usually from used clothes or bedding) as their origin or previous use or exposure is unknown. These further tear into smaller pieces or have threads that could fall into the food stream.

Microfiber, nonwoven fiber and generic kitchen cloths are usually better to use as compared to nonwoven cloths and cotton towels. Cotton towels are often used as they can be laundered and re-used. Re-usable cloths seem more convenient and less expensive but these re-usable cloths are often not properly disinfected. Disposable cloths or paper towels (where applicable) reduce the risk of cross contamination.



Effective steps to implement cleaning cloth management:

1. Firstly divide factory or manufacturing area into raw and RTE (ready to eat) then food contact and nonfood contact areas. Further divide raw and RTE areas if necessary into sub areas (for better control). Identify areas that will impact on Food Safety of products manufactured, areas such as maintenance, toilets, drains etc. (which must be allocated their own colours).
2. Source suitable cloth such as micro fiber or non-woven fiber or generic kitchen cloths – avoid rags or so called cut off's



3. Colour code cloths as per area or sub area. Failure to colour code will result in surface and/or equipment recontamination therefore spreading microorganisms throughout the facility.
4. Determine frequency of changing cloths per area, as over use will also result in contamination
5. Ensure cloths used for sanitizing are single use cloths as we would like to sign off a sanitized area and not introduce microorganisms.

6. Document colour coding of cleaning cloths and related cleaning equipment. Train all employees to ensure maintenance of cleaning cloth management.

Disadvantages of reusable cloths:

Towels and other reusable cloths are very absorbent due to their fabric weave. These material fibers aid in the multiplication of bacteria as they provide an ideal bacterial environment. If towel is contaminated, harmful bacteria not only survive but continue to multiply especially when towel is wet and kept at room temperature. Remember most microorganisms grow best at temperatures between 5°C and 63°C. The contaminated towel can spread the bacteria from your hands and the towel and to food contact surfaces as well as equipment and utensils it comes in contact with.

Do's



- Do not wipe or dry hands with towel
- Do not cover food with towel
- Do not hang towel to dry for later use
- Do not use towel if it is soiled or wet
- Do not use the same towel for many tasks

Don'ts



- Use single use disposable paper
- Use food grade material (stainless steel, foil etc)
- Replace with clean towel and launder dirty one
- Only use clean dry towels
- Treat cloth as a single use item



- Paper towels are best to use in ready to eat areas as no further processing will occur to kill any microorganisms that will be introduced.
- Similarly disposable method is best when handling raw meat and / or poultry – avoid risk of pathogens getting onto cloths that can be reused.
- Rather air dry equipment and utensils than wiping
- Where possible use alcohol based sanitizer which evaporates and does not need to be wiped or rinsed

There is an increasing market for the use of microfiber cloths which are more expensive. Due to the expense of these cloths people are very reluctant to dispose of them. They may be safe when stored in a bucket with sanitizer or bleach. If not cleaned, microfiber could present biological hazards



Just remember previous use of cut off's is unknown, it could have been used for pets!

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