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Disinfecting and Sanitizing in Foodservice Facilities

By Cynthia Kincaid

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In 2011, record amounts of cantaloupe, grape tomatoes, chicken, strawberries, ground turkey and pre-packaged salads were recalled because of foodborne illness and contamination. The economic and reputational costs of a food outbreak, due to lack of sanitation and infection control measures, can be incalculable. Still, the numbers are sobering.

In 2000, the **U.S. Department of Agriculture** estimated that foodborne illness from two E. coli organisms, plus Campylobacter, Salmonella and Listeria, cost \$6.9 billion, and the **National Restaurant Association** estimates that just

one foodborne illness can cost a restaurant upwards of \$75,000. The reputational costs can be high enough to drive a company out of business.

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“People are more aware of the importance of sanitation and infection prevention,” says Teresa Farmer, sustainability consultant for Knoxville, Tenn.-based **Kelsan Inc.** “People want to know that they are safe eating in an establishment, and seeing proper cleaning procedures being conducted in the front of the restaurant, and hand sanitizers placed near the restrooms, give people the assurance that they are being protected from disease.”

With these outbreaks has come even closer scrutiny from federal and state inspectors, providing jan/san distributors with the opportunity to assist their customers in staying within the law, and also providing the kinds of guidance and education that can help them run a profitable and safe business.

Understand Disinfecting and Sanitizing

Customers, now more than ever, are relying on their distributors to keep companies safe and in compliance. And one of the best ways to do this is to make sure customers understand the difference between sanitizing and disinfecting.

“People tend to use the words sanitizing and disinfecting interchangeably,” says Steve Rathbun, janitorial sales manager for Cedar Falls, Iowa-based **Martin Brothers Distributing Co., Inc.** “If you asked the typical person in a restaurant, they wouldn’t know the difference between sanitizing and disinfecting, unless we tell them.”

Sanitizing kills 99.9 percent of all organisms, whereas disinfecting kills 100 percent, says Rathbun.

“Disinfectants and sanitizers both fall under federal regulations for pesticides, so you have to follow pesticide regulations when you are using those,” he adds. “The typical restaurant owner doesn’t know that.”

Customers also need to know that sanitizers don’t need to be rinsed on a food contact surface; disinfectants do. The surface has to be pre-cleaned before using a sanitizer; a disinfectant cleans and disinfects at the same time. Sanitizers need adequate dwell time to do their job, and then they need to air dry. What often gets overlooked, Rathbun says, is that a disinfectant must be rinsed with potable water after cleaning.

“That’s a big must,” says Rathbun. “If you don’t, to an inspector, that’s just like taking a can of insecticide, spraying it on the table, and walking off.”

Using sanitizing and disinfecting products correctly will keep areas



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clean and companies in compliance.

“If someone does get food poisoning and there is an outbreak, the first thing the inspectors look at is the cleaning products being used,” says Leland Fishman, president of Petaluma, Calif.-based **Fishman Supply Co.** “They will come right back on the distributor if we haven’t done our job.”

Cynthia Kincaid is a freelancer based in Columbus, Ohio.

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