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Foodservice Sanitation and Infection Control

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 United States 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.

"People are more aware of the importance of sanitation and infection control/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."



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they are being protected from disease.

With these outbreaks has come even closer scrutiny from federal and state inspectors, leading many custodial managers to reach out to their distributors for assistance in staying within the law, and guidance and education that can help them run a profitable and safe business.

Emphasize Continuous Training

To be assured of proper foodservice sanitation and infection control for building occupants, thorough, understandable and regular training must take center stage.

"I was training in the kitchen of a large winery. They are incredibly concerned about sanitation," says Leland Fishman, president of Petaluma, Calif.-based Fishman Supply Co. "We went over microfiber use with the housekeeping staff, and then we did a 20-minute training session on how to ionize the water used in cleaning bar tops. This winery has been completely remodeled, and all of their sanitation procedures are going to change."

One of the biggest difficulties in providing consistent food sanitation and infection control training is getting all of the foodservice or cafeteria staff together at one time.

"Getting all the staff together is best, but if you're trying to train employees in a 24-hour facility, that's pretty impossible," says Steve Rathbun, janitorial sales manager for Cedar Falls, Iowa-based Martin Brothers Distributing Co., Inc. "In that case, set up an appointment and do one-on-one training with employees."

To aid in the training process, many distributors provide custodial personnel with teaching aids, such as training cards. These cards show cleaning processes and procedures in a step-by-step picture format.

"That kind of simple training works really well because you tend to have a lot of language barriers, depending on the cleaning staff," says Dougherty. "Simplistic training videos, cards and other documentation can be very effective training devices. Keep it as simple and efficient as possible. And make sure you are doing reinforcement training on a weekly, monthly and quarterly basis."

Farmer agrees, adding internal routine inspections to the mix to ensure that employees are properly cleaning and sanitizing around food preparation areas.

Partnership is also the key. Custodial departments that work together with their distributor to identify effective use of sanitation and disinfecting products around food and in food service areas, and those that implement proper staff training will be a step ahead in the prevention of an unwanted foodborne outbreak.

"We don't so much need to give them ways to cut costs as to show them more efficient and effective ways to sanitize and disinfect," says Tom Dougherty, healthcare and janitorial sales manager for Philadelphia-based Penn Jersey Paper. "The onus is on us, the distributors and manufacturers, to show them better ways."

And custodial managers should expect this from their distributors. In addition to being salespeople, jan/san distributors can provide extensive consultative services on best practices and custodial equipment improvements.



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best practices and custodial operations improvements.

This is particularly true in foodservice sanitation and infection control, where the advice a distributor gives, and the training a distributor conducts, just might save a reputation — and a life.

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