

KEEPING IT CLEAN



Some basic considerations for proper washwater treatment

By Fred Wilkinson
ProduceOps Editor

There's a key consideration in the food safety chain that's all wet — proper washwater management.

Fortunately for processors and handlers the key to effective washwater management is pretty straightforward: use clean water.

That goal, while not complicated, requires constant vigilance and commitment from management all the way down to workers on the floor.

Frank Schiffman, senior market manager, for Atlanta-based Axiall Water Treatment Products, named a handful of steps that underlie a proper water management program.

Axiall markets the Accu-Tab tablet chlorination system to fresh-cut processors and packinghouses. The system helps prevent cross-contamination and also can be used in field water irrigation. Axiall can custom engineer systems to

provide accurate and reliable chlorine dosing for well and surface water.

Schiffman suggests that handlers:

- Reduce the potential for cross-contamination by maintaining a chlorine residual in flume, wash and spray bar water. Recommendations for the chlorine level vary for different fruits and vegetables. The University of California-Davis' postharvest food safety guidelines include recommended levels by commodity. They also urge handlers to continuously monitor chlorine concentrations and pH of hydrocooling or washwater. The information is available online.
- In addition to monitoring water quality and chemistry including pH and chlorine concentration, Schiffman recommends monitoring water temperature.
- Adopting a HACCP program, Schiffman

said, is the best way to incorporate water management into an operation's overall facility design for safety and efficiency. Completing a Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points assessment and designing action plans can reduce risks to a safe level, although HACCP is considered the reduction of hazards rather than a finished product inspection.

- Contract for third-party audits to identify potential problem areas in your food safety efforts.

Postharvest safe water management isn't solely a packing line consideration.

The threat of cross-contamination requires sanitation throughout the system, including totes and bins.

With this in mind, Denham Plastics, Salinas, Calif., has set up what it bills as the CleanTec system for totes.

Denham is offering its sanitation system for reusable plastic containers to shippers and processors of salad mixes and other lettuce and leaf products, said Mike Hutchings, owner of Denham Plastics.

The system allows customers to own rather than rent RPCs, which are sent to Denham for washing with same-day turnaround, Hutchings said.

Denham will soon have the capacity to handle 100,000 RPCs each day, he said.

Another practice to consider is incorporating



These tanks hold treated chilled water ready to be re-used in a potato handling facility using Wonderware software.

wastewater management into a facility's overall process automation scheme.

An example of this is the Wonderware InTouch software, which is applicable to many water treatment control applications in food processing, according to the company.

Such automation and information management systems can enable raw material and energy/utility savings, production efficiency, ensure safety and regulatory compliance, guarantee product quality and help distribution optimization.



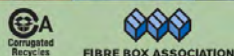
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