Pre-operational inspections

Legislative requirements

Under the Meat Facility Standards 2022, a pre-operational inspection of the facility is required as stated:

> **E1.1 Sanitation Program**
> **(f) The facility monitors that the sanitation practices are completed by conducting pre-operation inspections and taking necessary actions to address concerns.**
> **(g) Pre-operational inspection records are maintained for all processing areas.**

Pre-operational inspection goals

The purpose of a pre-operational inspection (pre-op) is three-fold: to check that the cleaning and sanitation procedures were completed, to ensure that no hazards exist before you start production, and to check that everyone has what they need to begin production.

The pre-op confirms that the cleaning and sanitation procedures were performed for each area of the facility that will be in use that day. Double-check that all areas and equipment to be used for the day are clean to the level described in the sanitation procedures. If you choose to conduct microbial swab as part of checking the effectiveness of your sanitation program, this is the time to do it because the equipment is dry and the sanitizer has done its job.

The pre-op is an opportunity to check that everything is in its proper place and that the facility is ready to commence production for the day. Check for things that could contaminate the production run, such as chemicals that are improperly stored, equipment that is leaking oil, or contamination that occurred since the last sanitation shift (e.g., broken glass, dust, etc.). If equipment or facility maintenance was performed between shifts, cleaning and sanitation of the area is required to address any remaining debris prior to the beginning of the production shift. Observations could also indicate other problem areas that require attention such as pest control or equipment maintenance.

The pre-op is also an opportunity to check that workers have everything they need to begin production, which helps to avoid production interruptions later on. For example, sanitizer temperatures, chemical concentrations of boot baths and other sanitizer dips, and basic supplies such as soap and paper towels are checked.

Operator responsibilities

The operator ensures that a pre-op inspection is performed for all slaughter, processing and storage areas of the facility for every day where slaughter and/or processing occurs. The worker who performs the inspection is termed the “monitor” and they document each pre-op inspection on a record. The state of cleanliness observed is indicated on the record and corrective actions, if required, to bring the facility and equipment into compliance are completed and noted. The facility worker (pre-op monitor) is trained to look for areas that may not have been cleaned and sanitized effectively or where recontamination since the last sanitation shift may have occurred.

Areas to inspect

Pre-op inspections and records are required for all processing and storage areas (including coolers/freezers) in the facility for every day of operation. Although not mandated, it is highly recommended that a pre-op inspection and record for the slaughter area be completed in order to trend non-compliances.

Three important tips for conducting a good pre-operational inspection

Training your workers prepares them to know what to look for and how to fill out the paperwork, including appropriate corrective actions. A good pre-op inspection can help prevent a food safety incident by using the senses of touch, smell and sight.

1. *Visual inspection*: Check that surfaces look clean and that there does not appear to be any meat or fat residue anywhere. Look to see if sanitation chemicals have been fully rinsed (except for leave-on sanitizers) and pools of water have been wiped dry. Check for evidence of pests such as mouse droppings or dead insects. A visual inspection will also detect if there are any oil or chemical leaks from equipment, or overhead water pipes, which could contaminate product. The colour of the equipment is also a visual indicator. For example, stainless steel can have different shades of colour that suggest it is not thoroughly clean. A blue shade on a stainless steel food contact surface may indicate fats not being correctly removed, a white shade may indicate the presence of a mixed organic as well as inorganic material, while a yellow shade may indicate fats have not been correctly removed from that surface. A pink shade on plastics could indicate the growth of pink mould.
2. *Smell inspections*: Clean rooms and equipment simply smell "clean." Foul odours can result from meat that has been trapped somewhere and is beginning to rot, fat that has turned rancid, or blood that is old or dried on. Lift the lids of equipment, check under tables and conveyors, and smell the lower parts of equipment and frames. Follow an undesirable odour to its source and correct it.
3. *Touch inspection*: Using a clean hand without a glove, lightly pass a finger over the equipment. There should not be any pick up of dust or dirt. If the surface is greasy, a finger swipe might leave a mark. If the surface feels gritty, it could indicate that the equipment was not rinsed properly.

Reporting tips

The checklist - A checklist is a template and it acts as a guide so that nothing is overlooked; it is thorough, and keeps the inspection organized and systematic so that it can be completed quickly. Create the checklist to flow with the walk-through of the inspection.

The record - Once completed, the checklist becomes a record that confirms the inspection was completed and it indicates where corrective action is required. The record communicates the results of the inspection. This is important to watch for when reviewing the paperwork during verification activities.

Close the loop – The record is an ideal tool to keep track of all areas inspected and required follow-up, both long term and short term. Follow-up action is noted on the record and it is signed off when complete to formally close-off the incident.

Spot trends – The record provides data that is analyzed to spot trends or repeat deficiencies. These repeated deficiencies might not seem important when looked at in isolation but become clearer when the big picture can be seen over time. For example, if the same area requires follow-up on a regular basis, investigate to find out why that is. Does the employee need more training, or do they lack the tools or time to complete the procedures? Addressing trends fixes the problem so that it does not recur while saving money, time, and possible food safety risks.

Demonstrate due diligence. Even if the facility is in pristine order and nothing out of the ordinary is noted, a record that says "good-to-go" proves that you took the time to check that the facility is ready for production. This could be valuable information if you have to investigate an incident to look for the cause.

Final thoughts

A pre-operational inspection is a systematic approach to starting the production shift. It makes sure that the facility is clean and sanitized, that everything is in order, and that the employees have what they need to do their job.

The information gathered by a well-performed pre-op is valuable for identifying and making improvements to sanitation and other facility programs and demonstrating due diligence.