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Treatment Manual

Certifying Facilities

Certification of Vacuum Fumigation Chambers

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Construction and Performance Standards

Vacuum fumigation consists of placing the commodity in a gastight metal chamber, removing most of the air, and replacing a small portion of it with a gas which is lethal to insects and other pests. Vacuum fumigation provides a more rapid penetration of commodities undergoing treatment than is obtained in normal atmospheric fumigations.

Vacuum Chamber

Vacuum chambers are usually of welded steel construction. A rectangular chamber might be preferred for more effective use of space. Reinforcement of the chamber body by means of steel ribs, or other supports, is usually required to enable the chamber to withstand the difference in pressures when the vacuum is drawn. Doors can be provided at one or both ends of the chamber. In cylindrical chambers, the doors can be either concave or convex, but in rectangular chambers flat doors are commonly used with suitable reinforcements. The doors can be hinged at the side, or at the top and counterbalanced. Many doors are fitted with special mechanisms for rapid closing. Door gaskets should be durable and at the same time provide gastight seal. To a large extent, the efficiency of a chamber depends upon the tightness with which the door or doors will seal. All other chamber openings must be equally tight to sustain the prescribed vacuum over a specified period of time.

To permit circulation beneath the load, the chamber must be designed to enable the stacking of commodities on pallets, skids, or small trucks. Small chambers that are usually hand loaded have removable floors.

Vacuum Pump

Each installation required a high quality, high capacity vacuum pump. The vacuum pump should have the capacity to reduce the chamber pressure to 1 to 2 inches (25 to 51 millimeters) of mercury (28 to 29 inches or 711 to 737 millimeters vacuum) in 15 minutes or less.

Fumigant Introduction Systems

The size of the chamber will determine the introduction system needed. For small chambers and for introducing fumigants in small quantities, measure the fumigant by volume using a graduated dispenser. For larger chambers place the gas supply cylinder on a platform scale and measure the amount of fumigant by weight.

For methyl bromide, a volatilizing unit is required to ensure fumigant introduction in a gaseous state. The volatilizer is located outside of the chamber between the gas cylinder or dispenser and the introduction port of the chamber. Essentially, the volatilizer consists of a metal coil submerged in water hot enough to vaporize the fumigant. The volatilizer must maintain the water temperature to at least 150°F throughout the entire gas introduction period.

Within the chamber the gas introduction system should consist of tubing with multiple, graduated openings that will provide uniform distribution of the fumigant throughout the length of the chamber. Ensure that the fumigant enters the chamber from multiple points along the ceiling.

Circulation and Exhaust System

Adequate gas distribution is often hindered by the cargo placed in the chamber. To overcome this, equip vacuum chambers with a circulation system. If fans are employed, the number of fans required would depend upon the chamber design, volume, and loading arrangements. A minimum of 2 fans is normally required for chambers of over 1,000 cubic feet capacity (28.31 m^3). Place the fans at opposite ends of the chamber facing each other—one high, one low. Additional fans might be required for larger chambers. The fans should be capable of circulating air at the rate of at least one-third the volume of the chamber per minute. Some fumigants require nonsparking, explosion-proof-type circulation systems.

In most installations, the vacuum pump is used to remove the fumigant following the exposure period. The air-gas mixture is pumped out of the chamber through exhaust ducts or stacks installed for that purpose. The actual height of these stacks will vary with the location of the chamber, and may be regulated by local, state or federal safety ordinances.

Accessories

Equip chambers with a vacuum gauge and an instrument for measuring and recording the vacuum drawn and maintained during the exposure period. Install a temperature monitoring device in chambers used for quarantine treatments that are six or more hours in length. Combination temperature and vacuum recorders are available.

Certification Standards

To qualify for program approval, vacuum chambers must be able to meet or exceed specified vacuum leakage tests. There are four classification levels in which a chamber may be certified. The tests are listed below and determine the classification under which the chamber qualified.

Important

There should be no commodity in the chamber during the certification procedure.

TABLE 6-1-1 Vacuum Chamber Classification Table

Classification	Initial vacuum (inches)	Allowable vacuum loss			
		4 hr	6 hr	16 hr	24 hr
Superior	28 1/2	—	1/2”	—	1"
A	28 1/2	1/2”	—	1"	2"
B	28 1/2	1"	—	2 1/2”	3"
C	26	1"	—	2 1/2”	3"

In addition to the classification tests in Table 6-1-1, ***ALL*** chambers must be capable of meeting the following requirement: A vacuum equivalent to 26 inches (660 mm) of mercury is drawn. The vacuum is then reduced to 5 inches (127 mm) and held for a period of 4 hours. A vacuum of 2 inches (55 mm) or more after 4 hours is considered adequate for this test.

- Chambers classified “Superior” or “A” are approved for all vacuum treatments. These chambers are to be tested annually.
- Chambers classified “B” are approved for all vacuum schedules up to and including 28-inch (711 mm) sustained vacuum. These chambers are to be tested semiannually.
- Chambers classified “C” are approved for all vacuum schedules up to and including 26-inch (711 mm) sustained vacuum. These chambers are to be tested semiannually.

Once the chamber has met the requirements in Table 6-1-1, the approving APHIS official must complete PPQ Form 480, Treatment Facility Construction, Operation and Test Data, and PPQ Form 482, Certificate of Approval. A copy of each of the forms should be given to the owner/operator of the chamber and also mailed to :

USDA-APHIS-PPQ-CPHST
Treatment Quality Assurance Unit
1730 Varsity Drive, Suite 400
Raleigh, NC 27606

Approving a chamber for vacuum fumigation does not include approving atmospheric (NAP) fumigations. If the vacuum chamber will also be used as a normal atmospheric pressure chamber, it must also pass a pressure leakage test (see page-2-5-6).

Actual detailed instructions for constructing a vacuum chamber are not included in this discussion. The information presented is designed to list the component parts needed and the function of each. Instructions and additional information can be obtained from the following list of vacuum chamber manufacturers. In furnishing the names of these dealers, no discrimination is intended against any firm whose name may have been omitted. Neither does this program endorse the firms mentioned nor guarantee the reliability of their products. The list is furnished solely for information and convenience.

Partial List of Manufacturers of Vacuum Chambers

Slack Associates, Inc.
540 South Longwood Street
Baltimore, MD 21223

Vacudyne Altair
375 East Joe Orr Road
Chicago Heights, IL. 60411

CosMed Group
28 Narragansett Avenue
Jamestown, RI 02835
401-423-2003

The following three companies (SFS, ETO and BQA) are subsidiaries of the CosMed Group.

Sterilization and Fumigation Services, Inc. (SFS)
3500 Shiells Road
Newman, CA 95360
Plant Manager, Peter Baker

Phone: 209-862-4074
Bill Lanning
Phone: 208-880-0746

ETO Sterilization
2500 Brunswick Avenue
Linden, NJ 07036-2432
Vice President of Operations, Karen Burns
Phone: 908-862-7077
FAX: 908-862-7168

Baltimore Quality Associates, Inc. (BQA)
4200 Boston Street
Baltimore, MD 21224
Ellen Heath
Phone: 410-327-0916