

CHAPTER 2

INSPECTION RESPONSIBILITIES

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2.1 INSPECTOR'S DUTIES

An important aspect of the inspector's job is to ensure that products are processed, stored, and handled in a sanitary manner. However, both the plant management and the inspector have specific sanitation responsibilities which should not be assumed by the other. The plant management should not view the inspector as an additional foreman, sanitation supervisor, or quality control supervisor. Likewise, the inspector should not minimize the value of his/her presence and influence in those plants or situations where a good sanitation program exists. The inspector should work with plant management to ensure that management assumes its responsibilities to produce a clean product in a clean plant, utilizing sound hygienic procedures.

In circuits where plant locations are scattered over a wide area, Field Office Managers (FOM's) are authorized to delegate other personnel (licensees or contract samplers) to perform plant sanitation inspections; provided, in the judgment of the FOM, the person is qualified to perform the inspection and the plant has a good approval record. The delegated inspector shall be supervised periodically at the FOM's discretion.

The following are some qualities an inspector must have in order to be effective in performing inspections:

- a. Knowledge. The more knowledge an inspector has, the more effective he or she can be.

The inspector should acquire a basic understanding of why good sanitation is vital. Being prepared and able to explain the "whys" of sanitation go a long way toward being an effective inspector. The inspector should know the industry and its operational procedures. This includes the cleaning procedures used on equipment within the plant. The better an inspector knows the industry, the easier the job will be. It is important to know not only what can be done but also what cannot be done.

Standards and requirements change as new knowledge and procedures are introduced. Inspectors must receive ongoing training to keep current with standards and requirements. Example: In many mass production situations, workers can easily lose sight of the end result or purpose of their work.

In the case of food processing, the worker may no longer view the product being handled as an article of human food. This is a dangerous attitude that can lead to a complete breakdown of sanitation standards. The inspector must not only guard against this attitude but must serve as an example of the best in personal hygiene, dress, and methods of handling food products.

- b. Attitude. The inspector should have a courteous, considerate, and patient approach but be firm in insisting that the plant comply with sanitation requirements. The inspector should be consistent from day-to-day and from plant-to-plant. The same sanitary standards must be applied with equal fairness to all plants.
- c. Judgment. Judgment is the ability to choose a just or wise action based on conclusions made from the circumstances presented. No matter how they are defined, good judgment and common sense are essential elements of good inspection. There are few clear-cut formulas or universal standards to go by; therefore, inspectors must cultivate and develop the ability to make decisions based on the potential for product contamination, good judgment, common sense, and sound reasoning.

2.2 PLANT MANAGEMENT DUTIES

When a processor enters into a contract that requires a product to be inspected or graded by USDA, the responsibility is assumed to produce a clean product in a clean plant under hygienic conditions and in accordance with USDA regulations and FDA's Good Manufacturing Practice Regulations. This also includes cooperating with the inspector and providing information and assistance necessary for the inspector to do a proper sanitation inspection.

Plant management duties include:

- a. Assigning a competent individual(s) (depending upon the size of the plant) the responsibility for plant sanitation.
- b. Ensuring that no person affected with a communicable disease or while afflicted with boils, sores, infected wounds, or other abnormal sources of microorganism contamination works or visits in any areas of the establishment where there is likelihood of disease transmission or food ingredient contamination.
- c. Reporting promptly to local health authorities all known or suspected cases of communicable disease among their employees.

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- d. Training plant employees in proper food handling techniques and food protection principles so that they shall be alert to the dangers of poor personal hygiene and insanitary practices.

The area of personal cleanliness is a most difficult one in which to obtain effective action. Bad habits of long standing must be eliminated and rigid rules of personal hygiene and practice must be instituted.

- e. Setting standards in sanitation at a high level and striving to develop attitudes in personnel consistent with the responsibility and obligation to achieve and maintain a sanitary food processing operation.

2.3 PERSONAL HYGIENE (FDA 128.8)

The facility and equipment may be essentially clean and free from any contaminants, but the product is still not considered processed under sanitary conditions if individuals located at the plant do not maintain a high degree of personal hygiene.

Dirty or contaminated hands or clothing present a serious potential source of contamination to products. Clean hands, clean clothing, and hygienic practices reduce the likelihood of contamination of the product and product-contact surfaces of equipment, utensils, and packaging materials.

- a. Disease Control. Boils, infected cuts, and sore throats are sources of organisms which cause staphylococcal food intoxication, the most frequently reported type of foodborne illness in the United States. A wide range of communicable diseases and infections may be transmitted by food handlers to other employees and consumers through contaminated food products and careless handling practices.
- b. Clothing and Personal Equipment. All persons handling commodities, ingredients, or their contact surfaces must wear clean outer garments.

All persons must wear caps, hats, hairnets, or other effective hair restraints (including facial hair restraints) where exposed product is handled to prevent hair from falling into product.

All loose or insecure jewelry, such as rings, wrist watches, etc., that might serve as a source of product contamination during work periods in which food or food components are manipulated by hand must be removed. Plastic or rubber gloves should be worn by all personnel who touch or manipulate processed food products by hand. If gloves are used in food handling, they should be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition. Such gloves should be of an impermeable material except where their usage would be inappropriate or incompatible with the work involved.

- c. Cleanliness. To avoid product contamination, all persons who handle any product must keep their hands clean. Fingernails should be neatly trimmed and kept clean at all times.

After visiting the toilet rooms or urinals or at other times when the hands have become soiled or contaminated, hands must be washed with soap and water before handling any product or implements used in the preparation of the product.

Necessary care should be taken to prevent contamination of product with substances such as perspiration, hair, cosmetics, tobacco, chemicals, and medicants.

Do not use tobacco in any form while engaged in food handling. When permitted by local law or ordinance, designated locations may be approved for smoking provided no contamination hazards will result.

Spitting on the floor is prohibited. Insanitary and unsightly personal practices, such as scratching the head, placing the fingers in or about the mouth or nose, or indiscriminate and uncovered sneezing or coughing should be avoided. The mouth must not be used to temporarily hold tags, pins, cards, or other objects that will directly or indirectly contact the product. Wetting of the fingers by the mouth in order to better grip or grasp containers or other items that come in contact with the food product is prohibited.