

DEALING WITH CLEANING AND HAND SANITIZING ISSUES IN THE H1N1 ERA



Matt Del Vecchio –
**Vice President
Foodservice,
Avmor Ltd.**

As if foodservice operators did not already have enough challenges on their hands in this “germaphobic” world we live in, H1N1 and the green movement has quickly forced operators to step up their approach to cleaning and hand sanitizing. Below are some helpful hints and tools to help you compete more effectively in today’s marketplace and to successfully grow your business.

1. CLEANING AND HYGIENE

Foodservice operators now have access to the hard facts regarding what their customers see, feel, and how they react to restaurant cleanliness. Unsurprisingly, the research confirms that food safety and hygiene are very high on the list of customer concerns. According to a survey conducted by *Nation’s Restaurant News*, 3 out of 4 respondents are concerned about restaurant cleanliness. More importantly, 7 out of 10 patrons would not return to a restaurant they deemed to be unclean. However, only one-third would report the problem directly to a manager or server. Most reported that they would leave the restaurant without complaining, but would tell other people about the unclean restaurant. Nearly 80% of respondents said that they would discuss unclean restaurant conditions with their friends and family. Foodservice operators are losing customers and business, without really knowing why. Is your establishment clean enough? Are you maintaining sufficient cleanliness routines?

When respondents were asked specifically about what they found to be unclean, nearly 65% said dirty floors; followed by restrooms at nearly 50%. They also cited dirty furniture, glasses, dishes or silverware, servers’ clothing, and servers handling money and food as examples of what they’ve noticed and deemed to be unsafe practices in restaurants. These results clearly demonstrate that customers pay close attention to details and make assumptions about the overall cleanliness and standards of your establishment based on such visual clues. Once patrons start questioning how clean the kitchen is, no amount of good customer service or delicious food is going to make up for the mental images of dirty kitchens, utensils, and poor hygiene.

On the other hand, customers also notice when an establishment is clean, particularly restrooms. More than 80% of those surveyed listed availability of supplies in restrooms as a sign of a restaurant with high cleanliness standards. Creating and supporting food safety programs, including clean surfaces and restrooms as well as a handwashing program for employees, are vital for today’s successful foodservice operator.

2. IMPLEMENTING HAND SANITIZERS

The H1N1 pandemic has resulted in greater awareness of the importance of proper hand care. One of the fastest growing trends in the foodservice industry has been the use of instant hand sanitizers. Foodservice operators have been scrambling to implement hand sanitizers in their establishments, particularly in areas where users don’t have easy access to running water, such as lobbies, cash registers, hostess stations, bus boy stations, food prep areas, washroom areas, and server stations.



There is a vast array of instant hand sanitizers in the market, the most popular being alcohol based (usually a formula containing ethyl alcohol or isopropanol alcohol). However, a significant shift is occurring to alcohol-free foaming hand sanitizers. The primary reasons for this shift are that alcohol-free foaming hand sanitizers are:

- Non-irritating to the skin (no drying or chapping)
- Non-flammable
- Do not transfer alcohol smell to food items
- Significantly less expensive

Customers like to see signs reminding employees to wash and sanitize their hands. The more signs there are dedicated to food safety, the better patrons feel about the restaurant. Nearly 75% of respondents said that they would feel better about the restaurant's commitment to food safety if they saw a server use an instant hand sanitizer. Therefore, ingrain cleanliness and neatness into your staff training whenever possible.

3. GOING GREEN

The foodservice industry is experiencing an unprecedented conversion to green cleaning. Many products traditionally used by foodservice operators for cleaning were toxic to the environment and linked to common health problems, including skin irritations and respiratory diseases. By switching to a green cleaning program, you will be able to reap the additional benefit of improving the health and well-being of your employees, as well as your customers.

Environmentally friendly products were once considered too costly or did not have the quality standards to meet the needs of restaurants. This is no longer the case as there are cost-effective products available that perform just as well, or even better, than conventional products. Further cost savings can be realized through the implementation of organic products, energy conservation programs, recycling/waste reduction systems, water conservation, reduction of hazardous cleaning chemicals, chlorine free and recycled paper products, to name a few.

Foodservice establishments are also going green in order to meet the evolving demands of their customers. Consumers are now demanding healthier options; not only in the food choices available, but also in the way the businesses are being managed. The National Restaurant Association's research indicates that 62% of consumers are likely to choose a restaurant based on its environmental friendliness.

Ultimately, going green differentiates your establishment from competitors. It will not only help you attract new customers, but it will also serve to increase the loyalty of your existing customers. What's more, the process of going green will have a positive impact on the morale and productivity of your employees. There is no better time to put the green movement into action in your establishment. Many websites are helpful in assisting you in the process, including: www.conserve.restaurant.org; www.terrachoice.com; www.cagbc.org; and www.energystar.gov. Existing or potential suppliers can also be an excellent source of help and information.



4. SUSTAINABLE CLEANING

When making the switch to a sustainable cleaning program, keep in mind that not all green cleaning products are created equal. By first doing your research, you will be able to choose the best products for your needs. Taking the time to train your employees to use the products efficiently is also vital in order to ensure the optimal performance of the products purchased. **A comprehensive green cleaning program entails more than just the use of non-toxic chemicals and should cover all areas of cleaning, including an effective hand care program.**

Be aware of the different options on the market, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of each method. Below is a quick review of biological and chemical green cleaning technologies.

Biological Cleaning: A biological cleaning solution uses biological decomposition to clean and deodorize. These solutions harness nature's own processes to recycle waste into simple and essential substances. They meet today's demands for cleaning, odour control, and waste elimination without the use of potentially harmful chemicals.

There are four main advantages to using biological cleaners and odour control products:

- ✓ They are better for the environment and safer when compared to traditional products;
- ✓ They use highly specialized enzyme producing microbials to clean and control odours by eliminating the soils that traditional chemical products alone cannot treat;
- ✓ They provide residual cleaning up to 80 hours after application and therefore reduce overall labour costs by continuing to work long after application;
- ✓ They help to displace unknown, potentially disease causing bacteria with known, healthy microbials and in this way contribute to our better health.

Chemical Cleaning: Chemical based products can also offer an environmentally responsible method for effective cleaning. For example, hydrogen peroxide is particularly attractive because it can break up organic matter and then prevent grease from sticking onto the surface. Other benefits of Hydrogen peroxide are:

- ✓ Creates no toxic or hazardous by products – it breaks down into water and oxygen
- ✓ Is safe for hard surfaces and textile finishes
- ✓ Biodegradable
- ✓ Has excellent stain removal properties
- ✓ Eliminates odours
- ✓ Improves wastewater quality in sewer systems
- ✓ Helps reduce biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) and chemical oxygen demand (COD) — key parameters in measuring water quality
- ✓ Can detoxify cyanide, nitrogen compounds, chlorine, bisulfate, phenol and a host of other toxic based waste

Although biological and chemical technologies differ from one another, they can safely complement one another. An ideal sustainable cleaning program will take advantage of the strengths of each technology for an effective and more complete



clean.

It is highly recommended to use products that have been third party certified. For example, EcoLogo's certification process will assure you that the products have met strict standards in terms of performance and sustainability. When it comes to equipment, try to use equipment displaying the Energy Star symbol wherever possible. Energy Star is the international symbol of premium energy efficiency and represents products that have been found to meet or exceed higher energy efficiency levels without compromising performance.

5. CHOOSING A WAREWASHING PROVIDER

For your establishment's warewashing needs, your service provider should ensure your total satisfaction from back to front of house, including all aspects such as installation, maintenance, and servicing dishwashers, equipment and dispensers. Look for a provider that will not only meet your restaurant's warewashing needs, but will take the time to answer all your questions and concerns – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Whether you require a dishwasher to be serviced, equipment to be installed, or assistance in the implementation of a customized cleaning and sanitization program for your foodservice operation, your provider should have a team of experts on hand to answer your requests – no matter how big or small. If you have undertaken the process of going green, it is important to choose a warewashing cleaning provider who focuses its efforts on social responsibility.

6. TRAINING, SERVICE, AND SUPPORT

Good customer service, support, and training can be as important as the right cleaning solution. Look for a service provider who can offer added value and support in the form of hands-on training, sanitation programs, wall charts, proper labels and MSDS sheets. Some providers will even offer free on-site consultations and audits for a thorough examination of your establishment's cleaning practices and chemicals used. This added service will allow for the service provider to tailor a customized cleaning and sanitation program to meet your particular needs.

The cleaning solution and service providers you choose should address all your needs and concerns and provide you complete satisfaction in terms of performance, efficiency, sustainability, and food safety. This, in turn, will provide the framework for your business to shine. Your foodservice operation is more than a business: it is your brand. Allow your brand to sparkle by polishing all key aspects of your operation: from food safety, to the health and safety of your employees, customers, and the environment.

