

Hygiene: How to organize Personal Hygiene properly

In companies with a lot of manual labour Personal Hygiene is one of the most important elements of the hygiene concept. It is not only important to set clear rules, but also to provide enough resources for the rules to be lived by.

The goal of Personal Hygiene is that employees are not a source of food contamination with microbes, foreign bodies or unwanted chemicals (including allergens). It is not only about setting clear behavioural rules of employees, but also about providing the appropriate resources (work clothes, hand washing devices, etc.).

Resources

Sufficient resources must be available in order for employees to behave correctly in a zone-compliant way:

Work clothes: Work clothes should cover the whole body and be comfortable. They must be cleaned regularly and be available in sufficient quantities. After cleaning, the condition of the clothing must be checked so that it does not become a source of foreign matter. Cross-contamination of work clothes to street clothes should be avoided with separate storage in the changing rooms.

Head cover: Headgear (i.e. disposable caps) is needed wherever unpacked foods are handled. Headgear prevents hair or dandruff from getting into the food. If headgear is needed, it should be large enough to be comfortable to wear and cover the hair completely. Dispensers for disposable caps should be set up so that headgear can be worn before putting on work clothes.

Beard Protection: Just as with hair on the head, beard hair can also contaminate food. For beards, therefore, a beard protection is necessary in same areas where headgear is mandatory. It is important that this protection covers the whole beard.

Mouthguard: When dealing with open critical materials such as ready-to-eat fresh products, a mouthguard is recommended. Alternatively, for larger production areas also food hoods can be used, which are a combination of headgear and mouthguard.
If mouthguards are used because of occupational safety (example dust protection), they must be designed accordingly.

Gloves: For hygiene reasons, gloves are used in manual labour with ready-to-eat foods. If gloves are used because of hygiene, disposable gloves should be selected. The choice of colour for the gloves is important in order for them to be distinguishable from the product colours. For larger facilities, different colours can be used to mark a regular change during the day (hourly or half-hourly colour changes or different colours per shift).

Gloves often give a false sense of security. Failure to change gloves on a regular basis can be counterproductive: Contaminated sweat or debris can then contaminate the food.

Sometimes gloves are used because of occupational safety, such as: protection against chemical or mechanical injuries and burns. These protective gloves must therefore meet the protection requirements of the respective application.

Shoes: Shoes should be comfortable. A sole cleaning unit should be provided. To avoid cross-contamination, work shoes should be stored separately from street shoes.

Hand washing devices: The hand washing device must be designed in such a way that liquid soap, disposable cloths, trash bin and disinfectants are fixed in such a way that too much walking around when washing hands is avoided. If a hand washing device installation without non-contact operation is selected, the employees must be trained to turn off the water with the disposable tissues in order to avoid cross-contamination. Hand disinfection is mandatory after washing of hands for all production staff. In order for the disinfectant to work hands must be dried before disinfection.

Before work, after using the toilet, as well as after dealing with unclean materials, hand washing is a must. Hand washing and disinfection is one of the most effective means of personal hygiene. However, this can only be adhered to if there are enough and properly executed hand washing devices.

Hand care is just as important. Cracked hands are difficult to keep clean. If hands need to be washed a lot, it may be useful to provide additional hand cream dispensers.

Rules and employee behaviour

The requirements are based on a hazard analysis. For example, if packed food is handled, face hoods are not necessary. In a high-hygiene zone, however, good headgear is of course a must.

The rules must be explained to all employees in an introductory lesson upon job start and in annual hygiene trainings. In the hygiene training not only the "how" but also the "why" should be explained. That means with the hygiene training also the right awareness should be reinforced. The rules for employees are as simple and robust as possible. It should be easier for employees to follow the rules than to disobey the rules. For example, it is easier to go through a turnstile with hand washing compulsion than to go under or over the turnstile.

Visual aids

Visual aids help to focus attention on the correct way of working to the places of work in question.

Visual aids can be photos or graphics. A photo of a properly dressed employee at the entrance of the production can replace long explanations.

In order for the symbols to be also understood by employees with a foreign language these visuals should include limited written explanations.

Feedback

Misconduct among employees is addressed immediately. Above all, the form of the intervention is important. The feedback from the supervisor should be friendly, polite, explanatory and determined. Disciplinary measures should only be taken if deviations are repeated from the same person in the same way.

The more manual labour is conducted, the more important the personal hygiene becomes. Although personal hygiene sounds simple, creating a simple and reasonable concept can be challenging. In some cases, it would make sense to consult an external specialist for concept work and possible training courses.

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