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Catherine Watkinson, Global Technical Hygiene Specialist at Hillbrush, a leading supplier of cleaning and hygiene products for the foodservice and food manufacturing industries looks at best practice for hotels regarding cleaning and food safety:

“Ensuring that your food and beverage operation is clean and tidy is a prerequisite of good food hygiene practice. It promotes a positive image to residents and their families, ensuring that your establishment is as popular as it can be. Poor hygiene is a turn off, but bacterial contamination can also cause serious illness and result in a visit from the environmental health officer, possible prosecution and shut down of your business. It pays to make cleaning and hygiene your top priority.

“HACCP is a recommended management system where businesses identify possible food safety risks as critical control points (CCPs) throughout the kitchen food preparation and handling process – from the kitchen right through to service. Your basic HACCP plan should include various monitoring, verification and record keeping procedures, from ensuring that everything is dated once opened (likely also with a date for when the product should be thrown away/used by) to keeping the fridge temperature below 5°C and the freezers below -18°C.

“It is important to chill and defrost foodstuffs correctly to slow down bacterial growth and keep them fresh for longer. This will help with stock rotation but also ensure maximum food safety levels – essential when catering for vulnerable groups such as the elderly. Generally, the lower the temperature, the slower the bacteria will grow. Unfortunately, cold temperatures don’t stop bacteria from growing altogether, particularly with resilient bacteria, such as *Listeria Monocytogenes*. Bacteria will grow in what is known as the ‘Danger Zone’, which is a temperature range of between 8°C and 63°C. This is because these are optimal conditions for bacteria to grow and replicate. Most bacteria will be ‘killed’ at high temperatures (over 63°C) but standard advice is to cook food until it has reached 70°C and has stayed there for at least 2 minutes, or 80°C for 6 seconds.

Good cleaning means good hygiene

“Alongside a thorough HACCP plan, using high quality colour coded cleaning equipment along with good cleaning practices are key to avoiding cross-contamination. So, at a basic level, the same equipment should not be used to clean surfaces in contact with food as cleaning the floor. Using colour coded brushes for different types of cleaning jobs will help keep a rigorous cleaning programme in place. This is a practice widely used in food manufacturing which is now being adopted in many catering operations.

The importance of training staff in food hygiene

“Once food hygiene procedures are in place, all staff need to have adequate training to ensure it is implemented effectively. It’s good practice to ensure any new starters too have an induction to understand the basic principles of food safety relevant to their role before they start work. It is also ideal to record any training, so you can show enforcement officers during their visits that you have implemented a training programme.

“As a legal minimum, all food handlers must receive training commensurate with their duties and responsibilities – generally this is basic food hygiene training (Food Safety Level 1 or 2). As an ideal, all supervisory and management staff should receive higher level training at either level 3 or 4 food safety”.

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