Comments from the Inspector on Manually Cleaning and Sanitizing Equipment and Utensils

Food Safety Team, USAF School of Aerospace Medicine

Properly washing and sanitizing equipment and utensils is an important factor in preventing foodborne illnesses. If this is done by hand (manually), a three-compartment sink is needed.

The first compartment is used for washing equipment and utensils. The washing process is when soil and food debris is removed. To effectively do this, the wash solution temperature must be maintained at 110 degrees F or above. It is also important to use the correct amount of detergent.

The second compartment in the sink is used for rinsing the washing solution from equipment and utensils. The detergent used for washing the dishes can interfere with the sanitizing process; therefore, it is very important to properly rinse equipment and utensils before immersing them in the sanitizing solution (third compartment).

Sanitizing (or sanitization) is the treatment of a surface that has been previously cleaned to reduce the number of disease-causing microorganisms to safe levels; this takes place in the third compartment. Heat or Chemicals can be used to sanitize equipment and utensils in manual warewashing operations. Heat sanitizing involves immersing cleaned equipment and utensils for at least 30 seconds in water at 171 degrees F or above.

There are several chemicals that can be used to sanitize food contact surfaces, but the most common one is chlorine. A chlorine solution must meet the minimum concentration requirements listed in section 4-501.114 of the Food Code. At room temperature, the minimum concentration is 50ppm (approximately one teaspoon bleach per gallon of water). Equipment and utensils must be immersed for at least 7 seconds to ensure proper destruction of microorganisms.

For more information, contact your base Public Health office 6-1225. Or contact the Food Safety Team at the USAF School of Aerospace Medicine (Brooks AFB, TX), at (210) 536-2058 -DSN 240-2058- or E-mail a message to jose.diaz@mirage.brooks.af.mil