



Cleaning Equipment **Colour Coding**



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Color-coded tools are a practical, straight-forward way to implement zoning in a facility and may help keep different hygiene levels, such as raw and finished products, separated.

Making the Decision to Apply Color-Coding

Consider the benefits of color-coding. Many food processors are taking proactive steps by instituting color-coding as part of their Good Manufacturing Practices. These practices follow the guidelines of HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points), which is a risk-assessment tool used to manage potential food safety risks.

How color-coding can be applied.

First, color-coding can be implemented to provide "zone control" within a food processing or food service facility. Different colors can be assigned to each step in the process or by manufacturing lines, whatever makes sense. When colors are assigned to zones, confirming that a tool is misplaced is easy, and tracing it back to its point of origination is quick.

Second, color-coding may be useful in instances where zones aren't necessarily required, such as dividing workspaces. For example, "Red" could mean "1st Shift", while "Blue" could indicate "2nd Shift." In this situation, shift employees are taught to understand which colored tools are for their shift, so they're less likely to use another shift's tools. Using color-coding to designate workspaces in this way can be particularly helpful to companies that closely monitor tool and equipment costs. The result can be a reduced incidence or misuse of tools in unapproved areas, as well as fewer lost or misplaced items.

Third, color-coding is often part of businesses that follow a 5S System, which integrates color "cues" throughout a work process or facility in order to reduce waste and optimize productivity. Color-coded tools intuitively complement and support the goals of a 5S workplace. The color-coding promotes a workplace culture where tools and supplies are placed where they are needed and well maintained for longevity of use.

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Finally, color-coding can also be employed to distinguish cleaning versus sanitation in a processor's maintenance routines. For instance, "Black" is a common color used to identify cleaning tools used on floors and around drains. Other colors can be selected to designate tools that are appropriate for sanitizing food contact surfaces, or to differentiate between tools that are specified for use with particular chemical agents. This practice can also help prevent the undesired occurrence of using a powerful cleaner on the wrong equipment.

What is a 5S System?

Developed by the Japanese, the 5S System organizes a workplace based on the five "pillars":

1. **Sort.** Workers are encouraged to eliminate all unnecessary tools and only keep essential items.
2. **Set in order.** Workers, equipment, parts, instructions and the work itself flow in an orderly, productive way that is free from waste.
3. **Shine.** The workspace and equipment are clean and organized. At the end of each shift, workers ensure all work areas are restored to their original, organized state.
4. **Standardize.** This pillar supports the previous three by instituting standard best practices and procedures at each step of the process.
5. **Sustain.** Maintaining proper procedures is made a habit throughout the organization.



Determining your facility's need for color-coding.

Many factors can influence a processor's decision to implement a color-coding system. Changes in industry regulations or a new manufacturing line can often be a first prompt.

To decide if color-coding is right for your facility, consider the following:

1. Does your facility process food, or serve the food service industry?
2. Do any of the ingredients used in the food production process pose microbiological threats?
3. Do you use certain chemicals in any area that would pose a threat if they were transferred to another area?
4. Is it necessary to segregate tools based on the areas where they are to be used, such as floors and drains vs. equipment surfaces, or food contact vs. non-food contact areas?
5. Does your facility process foods that contain ingredients that are known allergens?
6. Does your facility maintain a HACCP plan or a master sanitation schedule?
7. Does your facility employ a 5S System?

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8. Does your facility have separate manufacturing lines for different products?
9. Do you have a need within your facility to divide work spaces to maintain quality control?
10. Do you have a manufacturing process that must be consistent from plant to plant?
11. Are you a processor with employees who do not speak English as their native language? Or do you have plants in various countries with employees speaking multiple languages?
12. Do you have a problem with tools getting lost, misplaced or used inappropriately?
13. Must your facility meet certain sanitation standards?

If you answered YES to any of the questions above, your processing facility should consider color-coding.

Color-coding can be particularly helpful for:

- Maintaining strict work zones
- Reducing the risk of pathogens, allergens and other foreign contaminants affecting their operations
- Minimising miscommunication throughout a facility's processes

Implementing Your Color-Coding Plan

Having a color-coding program in place can help to limit the language confusion found in food processing facilities. Less confusion means safer practices, and this means better food safety. This can add up to fewer recalls, which saves money and helps any company's reputation.

Here are 5 best practices to remember when implementing your color-coding plan:

[1] Keep it simple. Limit the number of colors you use to around 3-5 in small or medium facilities. In larger food processing plants, keeping the number of colors each individual has to remember daily to the same small range can help keep everyone on the same page.

[2] Pick contrasting colors. Though it might be easier to remember that red is used on raw beef, it can also present a problem if someone drops a tool into product that's being worked on. If this happens, being able to easily spot a tool can mean the difference between a pricey recall and a fixable mistake.

[3] Avoid complicated color assignments. Having customised tools, like a green broom with a blue handle to represent a certain zone or allergen contact, will lead to confusion and chaos. Instant recognition is one of the largest benefits of color-coded tools and taking that away by complicating it will reduce its effectiveness. For that green broom, ensure both the handle and brush is green.

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[4] Roll out the program all at once. This will help in avoiding confusion. Make all tool changes at one time, along with an education program and a widely announced start date for the new transition.

[5] Use signage for reinforcement. Don't leave room for ambiguity with color-coding. Let signs, in however many languages are needed, remind workers which color is assigned to which zone.

Color-coding is an effective way to minimize cross-contamination or other hazards within a processing facility. While not a requirement of many regulating bodies, color-coding can demonstrate a company's dedication to the quality and consistency of their products while maintaining a high level of safety for both their employees and end users.



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