

# KPI FEATURE FOR INTERNATIONAL FOOD HYGIENE AUG 2003

The Ultimate Answer to Life, The Universe and Everything is 42, at least according to *The Hitchhiker's Guide the Galaxy*. So we reckon the answer to cleaning a food-processing plant should be a little higher, say 90.

Actually solving the fundamental puzzles of the cosmos can often appear as child's play to answering the simple question "how are we doing?" on cleaning a bakery or a bacon-processing line.

However we have developed a way of getting a single, numerical answer to the big question of how well is overall cleaning being carried out a site.

At the same time the system highlights specific issues on the factory floor, clearly indicates overall trends, and allows us to bring together seemingly disparate elements like test results for salmonella and staff service records into a simple, workable format.

We do it by bringing together a series of Key Performance Indicators, inputting them onto computer, and getting them to work together in a way that creates a meaningful, understandable picture of how a cleaning job is progressing.

By giving each KPI a weekly percentage figure we can come up with an average that can be assessed against a threshold figure – say 90 per cent - agreed with the client.

The idea is not to come up with a clumsy, single benchmark figure, which would in truth be little better than a guesstimate, but a result that has meaning because of the wealth of data sitting below. The final figure would also has greater meaning because it brings together seemingly diverse elements like microbiology, rapid hygiene testing (RHT) and soft issues like training and job descriptions.

One of the best ways of looking at this system of analysing KPIs is to think of it as a pyramid. At the apex sits a single percentage figure. Below that is a layer of

about five major KPIs, which in turn sit on layer of major indicators, and so on down to the foundations of individual assessments made on specific days.

Like a pyramid the strength of the system lies in keeping the bottom layers of the structure level. Anything out of kilter lower down soon shows up at a higher level.

Although we may be hitting our big, single figure target if all one of the KPI totals is seriously out of line with the rest – say in the 70 per cent range rather than the 90s - we know something is wrong and can drill down through the results to find why.

In fact a major or long-running problem soon becomes even more apparent because it is likely to effect more than one KPI. For example a reoccurring case of salmonella on a machine would distort the figures on KPIs like microbiology, rapid hygiene testing and deep cleaning.

Rather than hiding an individual problem, using a group of KPIs together tends to expose it. Indeed we can even emphasise faults by, for example, giving one point for a Pass but taking away ten points for a Fail.

The system also quickly highlights trends. Input a few weeks' results and display them as line graphs and it quickly becomes apparent where any reoccurring blackspots or sudden changes in standards have arisen.

Traditionally the basis of most inspections has been a joint walkabout by the client and contract manager to get a general feel of overall standards and spotting problems. The cleaner, meanwhile, often keeps a Blue Book Record, literally noting down in a blue note book any specific issues and jobs to be drawn to the client's attention.

Although they have their strengths Blue Books and walkabouts are largely subjective, rule-of-thumb methods of assessment. They note exceptions rather than successes – which meant a vast amount of useful data is left out. In addition inspection tours are often done in an ad-hoc, unstructured way with the client deciding either by whim, suspicion or routine what to look at.

This means that there is no total record of what had been inspected and when, and means that there is no way to properly audit the audits.

In addition although paper-based general inspections and Blue Books generate a vast amount of data on each cleaning contract, they do not provide a real way of analysing information or presenting it in a clear, easy to understand format.

In these paper-based systems the information we gathered is written on reams of paper and then put into large files, where it stays largely unread, unused, unloved and unanalysed.

Every so often one these arch-files is pulled off the shelf and a piece of information extracted. But getting details is often a laborious job and it is near-impossible to get any idea of overall performance.

So much for the theory, but let's look at how we actually implement a KPI system.

We have a batch of KPIs we use to assess most of our accounts, such as Safety, Standards and Good Service Practice (GSP) which covers elements like personnel, quality, training and work in progress. GSP is our main indicator for measuring how well we are handling the account.

To these we add any KPIs that we and the client believe are needed to assess the cleaning, such as RHT and microbiology results. It often includes assessments made by the client's own customers on cleaning standards.

Each of these KPIs is given an individual target we must meet, in addition to the overall threshold figure. This is a time of robust discussions about what is achievable, what can be measured, and what is a fair threshold of a good cleaning process.

This is arguably the critical stage of the process. Pick the wrong indicators and the system is flawed from the start: pick the wrong thresholds and the system either presents no challenge or is unachievable, both equally bad outcomes.

For example we discovered early on that while Rapid Hygiene Testing is an excellent cleaning tool, it was a surprisingly poor KPI. That was partly because an RHT will inevitably become a Pass because a failing area will be re-cleaned until it is acceptable. It was also partly because the industry prefers microbiology results as the Gold Standard for measuring cleanliness and food safety.

There is little point in agreeing KPIs or setting thresholds if there is no penalty for failing to reach targets. So we have a payback system under which we donate so many man-days of work free for every per centage point we fail to reach the main threshold.

The client can either spend the free days there and then or – as we prefer – accrue them during the year to spend on a large project, such as a major deep clean of a large production line.

Paybacks act as a great source of comfort to purchasing departments because we are often selling the actual concept of contract of cleaning as well as selling ourselves.

In practice in the first couple of months we usually come in just below target as we get to grips with the cleaning account – in fact it would be suspicious if we reached it in the early days and indicate that the thresholds have been set too low.

This method of analysing KPIs also allows us to ratchet up the quality threshold. For example over a year we should have moved our overall performance figure from say 90 per cent to 99 per cent.

To stop us getting into the realm of reoccurring decimal places of 99.something per cent each year we reduce the threshold back to its old position but make it harder to achieve.

So, for example we will reduce the Caution band between a Pass and Fail, or scrap the Caution level altogether. As noted above, we can also make the penalties for a Fail far harsher, increasing it from say one point to ten. Effectively this gives a fresh mountain to climb each year and a proper incentive to perform.

One of the main issues we face when starting a big contract is how to divide the premises up into meaningful, measurable areas. Do we do it by area, by product, by manager, by function?

The simple task of noting down every surface that has to be cleaned, the method and standard can be a task that takes weeks. For example it took two months to go through the premises of one large client and reduce thousands of cleaning tasks into Excel spreadsheets - which if printed out would have filled a wheelbarrow - and then bring them together into a system which made sense of the vast amount of data being generated.

It was again a matter of creating a KPI system which was detailed enough to create meaning, but simple enough to create meaningful results.

The main drawback with analysing KPIs is that it does require some poor soul to sit down frequently and enter a lot of information onto a PC. However it does mean that information which was previously being stored neatly but uselessly away in files is being used.

In fact using KPIs this way can, in the long term, simplify and speed up the input of data. One of the main issues we had with one client was adapting their internal microbiology testing to our systems.

Previously the client had stored microbiology results in a series of large files. Each month we had to look through eight of these, comparing the latest results with the previous, job by job, with the information needed contained somewhere in a two-foot thick pile of paper.

We ended up creating a series of electronic spreadsheets that not only matched our systems but also vastly simplified the client's recording and analysis methods

Indeed even the irksome task of inputting from paper files could soon be done away with. Our planned next stage in KPI analysis is the introduction of palm tops to staff on site as a way of instantly recording what is happening with a cleaning contract.

I foresee this will lead to real-time analysis of a site that will highlight any problem areas or general issues very quickly and allow us to rectify them almost immediately.

The KPI scores reflect what is happening on site, which makes them almost impossible to fix. If we were to deliberately distort the figures to hide a problem the client would soon notice that our results and what was happening on site bore no relation, and we would be laughed off the premises.

Simon Brunker is technical manager and the company microbiologist at Hygiene, the market leader in the specialist contract cleaning services to the conscious food and pharmaceutical industries.

Formed in 1983, the £20 million turnover company employs more than 900 full time staff, working through a national network of 12 service centres. It was the first firm in the industry to win a company-wide ISO9002 status, in addition to its Manpower Services Commission Training Awards and Investors in People accreditation.

The specialist cleaning services provided by Hygiene include food production equipment; site services (amenities and wash stations); high level; kitchens; cryogenic; dry steam and silos. It also handles Rapid Hygiene Testing.

Hygiene also offers customers a range of related, services including pest control; security; laundry management waste management and office cleaning.

**Ends**