

# Washrooms that *encourage hygiene*

Food safety is of primary concern in the baking industry and since there is a great deal of manual handling of baked goods, it is absolutely vital that your washrooms proactively promote hygiene and encourage employees to follow hygienic practices.

**I**t is astounding to see the washroom facilities in some bakery operations, considering that the rest of the facility is spotless and hygienic. Without a doubt, a dark and unappealing washroom will discourage your staff from observing personal hygiene procedures, regardless of the other rewards or threats used to encourage hand-washing and hygiene.

At the very least the washroom should be well-lit, well-ventilated and spotlessly clean. Broken tiles, chipped and stained basins, leaking taps and wet, ragged and dirty towels will not motivate staff to use the facility frequently.

Ensure the walls and basins are smooth to promote easy cleaning and prevent injuries, that the taps are in working order and that there are always sufficient paper towels for drying hands.

Add some cheer by painting the walls in a vibrant colour, adding curtains and putting up hand washing and hygiene posters that constantly reinforce the importance of hand washing and provide guidelines on proper hand washing. This is also the ideal place to put up a chart tracking improvements in employee hand-washing and hygiene practices, perhaps measured by counting dispensers or swab testing.

For the best results, automation is the name of the game. From self-closing doors to automatic taps, soap dispensers and paper towel dispensers, the less surfaces staff members touch in the washrooms, the better, as this will prevent recontamination after washing.

If automated equipment is not practical or within budget, opt for low touch taps and dispensers. Alternatively, a bottle of sanitising spray should be made available at each wash station to sanitise taps and basins before use, and staff should be trained to use paper towels to close taps and doors after washing to prevent recontamination.

While this may sound a little obsessive, bear in mind that the surface areas of taps are high risk for contamination and can have microbial counts often 10-20 times higher than toilet seats.

Success also depends on how convenient and pleasant the hand washing experience is. If staff members have to queue to wash their hands in cold water with chemical soaps that burn and irritate the skin, and then dry their hands on a wet, used towel, participation is likely to be zero.

Ensure that there are a sufficient number of hand washing basins, with hot and cold potable water, mild yet effective soap, and sanitary hand drying paper towels in the washroom. The hot water should be 35°C and have a flow rate of 8 to 10 litres per minute. If hot water is not an option, choose a soap that will lather well in cold water. Add a few nailbrushes – they are 300 times more effective in cleaning fingernails than simply washing.

The entire washroom, as well as all the accessories, must be kept spotlessly clean, sanitised and hygienic at all times, or any progress made in encouraging good hygiene practices among staff members will be fruitless.