

Quality through Cleanliness: Part 2

by Larry Chase

This article is a continuation of **Quality through Cleanliness: Part 1**, which focuses on the many reasons that cleanliness is important in your brewery.

Key Components for Cleaning

Involvement of other people. One brewer can't do this alone though the brewer will most definitely be involved and leading the effort. It's important for all owners and any management to be involved even if only to show commitment from the top. Tasting room or kitchen employees, if you have them, can help reduce the overall workload. Definitely involve vendors, which we'll touch on shortly.

Ease. As a brewery-in-planning you can design into the brewery the ability to make cleaning easy. The easier something is to do the more likely it'll get done. Consider interior tank and pipe cleaning, equipment placement in the room, and methods of cleaning. Include this topic in your discussions with equipment manufacturers, engineers, architects, and others as you design your brewery. As you read in Charlie's quote, "the key is more good design."

System. A system guides and helps you ensure that what you intend to happen is actually happening. A system includes checklists, standard operating procedures, and an audit. As for checklists, Alastair Pringle, founder of Pringle-Scott LLC and brewing veteran, in a presentation on quality at the 2011 MBAA national conference stated that checklists help you get control. As a part of getting control, monitor the process through the use of your checklists. It ensures that you and others follow the same process to help create consistency.

Mark Fischer of New Belgium Brewing in an MBAA paper highlighted a system called 5S for sort, straighten, sweep, schedule, and sustain. Using this system New Belgium over 5 years realized benefits including better organization, use of less space, and getting things done with less effort. Their systematic approach led to a higher level of both internal and external cleaning and organization.

How to Make It Happen

Chemical Vendors. As touched on earlier, working with others will help make it happen. Chemical vendors are an excellent resource. Joe Dirksen, retired Senior Technical Coordinator at Ecolab, did this a lot in his job. "I can survey the overall sanitation needs of the brewery, assist with writing sanitation procedures, and provide a second set of

Quality through Cleanliness: Part 2

(page 2)

eyes for sanitation in the brewery,” says Joe. These people are specialists in cleaning, so tap into their help.

Co-workers. Employees take pride in making a difference and become more knowledgeable in the process. Consider training bartenders to clean tap lines. This frees up a brewer for other work and you now have an employee who knows how the tap system works as well as the importance of clean beer lines. Is a non-brewery team member interested in the brewery? Get them involved by giving them the responsibility for keeping a particular area or piece of equipment clean.

Daily. Focus on cleaning every day to really make it happen. Walk into work every day with this question in your head: What needs to be cleaned today that is best for the beer? Remaining focused every day keeps cleaning a priority. You’ll do cleaning tasks in small increments instead of letting them build up to an overwhelming pile of tasks. Use your checklists and SOP’s to help you focus.

Follow Larry’s 30 second rule. It’s easier, cheaper, and requires less time to take the extra 30 seconds right now to clean than to re-brew because you didn’t clean. I developed this rule after learning that under American regulatory parlance sanitizers must kill 99.999% of specified test bacteria within 30 seconds under conditions of the Official Detergent Sanitizer Test. So if a gasket falls on the floor, drop it in sanitizer for 30 seconds. Now the amount of time isn’t necessarily just 30 seconds. It could be five minutes or 30 minutes, yet both are still shorter than an 8-hour day to brew again and the wasted money of dumping beer down the drain.

Audit. Finally, track your progress with an audit. To build an audit divide the brewery into distinct areas and do a walk-through self-audit with other people: include your chemical vendor and/or someone who is not in the brewery every day—those “fresh set of eyes.” When listing the items you want to include follow a key component of quality assurance: only list it if you will do something about it after measuring it. As for scoring, keep it simple. Assign 1 point for items that meet the standard, 0 points for items that do not meet the standard, and -1 point for items that still have not met the standard since the previous audit. For certain critical items you can assign higher point values to indicate their importance.

Once the audit is built then carry out the audit. It’s best for someone who is not specifically responsible for doing the actual work to be the scorekeeper. Ideally audit the space monthly and at a minimum quarterly. Doing the audit at more regular intervals ensures that potential issues are found sooner. Incentivizing the audit is the best way to

Quality through Cleanliness: Part 2

(page 3)

ensure follow-up and follow through. Set a minimum expectation and reward for surpassing. Include the audit scores in regular performance appraisals. And while money is the most standard reward, use your imagination and ask what would be of value to your brewer.

Summary

Cleaning well is within the realm of every start-up brewery regardless of financial resources. Doing so will achieve the first basic expected quality measures of your beer being contamination-free. Of course this goes hand-in-hand with acceptable flavor, the second basic quality measure.



Contributing Author

Larry Chase

Professional Brewer

With a move from theology to brewing beer, Larry's been contributing to the craft beer world since 1997. He's worked with start-ups & implemented brewery turnarounds at both chain & family-owned brewpubs. He's a frequent speaker at the Craft Brewers Conference & was a Brewers Association Board member from 2013-2021. You'll find him regularly vying for "Dog Dad of the Year" & filling Chief Support Officer duties for his wife's professional speaking business.