Understanding And Selling The Value Of Food Grade Lubrication

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Maintenance of equipment in a food processing plant is, in many ways, similar to the maintenance performed in any other industrial plant. The need for extended lubrication cycles, reduced downtime, and increased safety remains the same.

The unique distinction concerns the use of H1 certified food grade lubricants applied in the processing rooms of the food plant. Typically, food grade lubricants are designated as H1 or H2. According to the National Sanitation Foundation, H1 means “this product is acceptable as a lubricant with incidental food contact for use in and around food processing areas” and H2 means “this product is acceptable as a lubricant where there is no possibility of food contact in and around food processing areas.”*

So how does this type of lubricant differ from most other types of lubricants? First, the lubricant raw materials are approved by the FDA, which means that these products pass rigorous testing to see what, if any, impact the materials have on human health. Furthermore, the quality and grade of the raw material can differ from product to product. A general rule of thumb can be followed here: high grade, high quality raw materials yield high grade, high quality lubricants.

Secondly, food grade lubricants are typically packaged and labeled differently from their industrial counterparts to avoid a potentially dangerous misuse of a non-food grade rated lubricant in the food processing area. This is a major issue due to the risk associated with food contamination, recalls, fines, and subsequent downtime, among other issues.

In an effort to prevent these problems from occurring in food plants, lubricant suppliers are utilizing color-based identification labeling systems, metal detectable aerosol components, and providing educational food safety marketing materials. In summary, choosing food grade lubricants certified and labeled for use in “food processing areas” helps to reduce the risk of food contamination. This, coupled with the proper application of high quality food grade lubricants, keeps production lines running longer between lubrication cycles, preventing downtime and, most importantly, saving money.

Besides understanding and identifying food grade lubrication, it's also important to develop ways of selling the value to other key members of a manufacturing operations team. Maintenance lubrication is a subject that is important from purchasing, the quality department, and all the way down to the production floor. Not surprisingly, selling the value of food grade lubrication requires an

understanding of multiple parts of an organization. The maintenance manager, the quality control chemist, and the operator applying the lubricant are all heavily invested in keeping downtime to a minimum and safety intact at all times. Understanding the linkage between these two major areas of concern is the starting point of connecting with the customer and what matters most to them.

Downtime at any facility is always a cause for concern. Minimizing factors that would lead to this therefore is a priority to the production team. Poor lubrication cycles, improper application methods, excessive moisture, and frequent washout are threats that they often face. Reducing the risk of all of this happening is integral in proving the value of the manufacturer’s quality and service.

When it comes to the safety factor involved in the use and application of industrial lubricants, the maintenance manager and the quality control chemists are tasked with ensuring that safety is always intact. This explains the need for H1 and H2 lubrication within the food facility. In addition, several manufacturers are trying to add to the value of this lubrication by altering the packaging to be food safe as well. Labeling and metal detectable components are directly related to reducing the fear that most safety professionals have when it comes to potential contamination.

Reducing the probability of a paper label falling into a batch of food product by using alternative labeling such as lithograph and silk screen is valuable to the customer. Detecting aerosol components that might have fallen into a batch saves the customer time from having to recall the batch later on. Contamination equals downtime, and downtime, as discussed earlier, is the ultimate threat to the success of the production process.

*NSF International/Nonfood Compounds Registration Program, 2004