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Three Steps to Adding a New Color to a Color-Coding Plan

There are a few reasons to add a new color to an existing color-coding plan. From changes in product to changes in processes or regulations, sometimes keeping processes streamlined means adding a color to avoid confusion.

Generally, we tend to recommend that each employee should only need to touch tools in 1-3 colors throughout their day to prevent confusion. Smaller plants can use color-coding plans that make use of four or five colors to create zones based on process steps or ingredients. Larger plants that have many different processing lines running at the same time may need more colors to keep their shifts, zones, process steps, and allergens separated. Regardless of size, a facility may decide to add a new color to their color-coding plan to divide out a processing step or denote tools used with a new allergen.

Here are the three steps to take when adding a new color to a color-coding program:

Step 1. Determine if a new color is actually needed

There are two main reasons to add a new color to a plan that already works well: changes in process or changes in products. However, there are also specific instances where adding a new color could increase food safety and worker efficiency.

A new color could be helpful if:

- You're adding a new product that contains different ingredients and/or allergens
- You're adding new ingredients that may or may not be allergens to an existing product
- You're adding a new shift to the work day

- You want to reorganize your color-coding plan to break down more process steps
- You want to increase tool traceability within your facilities

Be aware that simple is often better when it comes to color-coding. Adding a new color isn't always the best the solution. For instance, if you notice workers mixing up tools, it may be the case that more education, training, and signage are needed instead of another color.

Step 2. Choose which color to add

Just like the tools themselves, color should be fit-for-purpose. For example, dark colors like gray or brown work well outdoors and on floors because they'll typically get dirty fast and stay that way throughout their lifespan. Because the colors can hide dirt well, they're also an excellent choice for high-visibility areas like hallways and lobbies. Light colors are an excellent choice for finished products because it's easier to visually identify if the tool has a crack that could harbor bacteria, or if it simply needs to be cleaned or replaced. Lime and other vivid colors work well for allergens, since the bright hue is easily seen, even by color-blind employees.

Colors should be easy to spot against the product they'll be used with. Choosing yellow for wheat may make sense when it comes to remembering the color-coding scheme, but the matching hues won't be helpful if a scraper gets dropped into a vat.

Step 3. Integrate a new color

When adding colors, all planned changes should happen at one time. This helps to minimize confusion and create a smooth transition. The day before the colors are to be added, signs should be posted and managers should remind employees about the upcoming changes.

Before the change goes into effect, training on how the change will benefit the plant and help keep the food supply safe should help get everyone on the same page. This can also increase food safety culture by giving employees a chance to become invested in the updated color-coding program. Training programs that strike a balance between being short and informative are more likely to positively influence employees.

Manager oversight is essential, especially during the first few days or weeks after the change, depending on the plant's culture. If mistakes are made once the new colors are added, have additional training sessions and make sure there's adequate signage in every language spoken in the facility.

Though color-coding plans are often best kept simple, sometimes that simplicity requires adding another color. This change can be spurred by process or ingredient changes, or by new regulations. Regardless, adding new colors to a color-coding program should be accompanied by training, signage, manager oversight, and more training as needed to ensure the program's success.

Remco Products is here to help plants of any size create or modify their color-coding plan. Our knowledgeable business development managers can visit your facility to help you add new colors to an existing plan, or build a full color-coding program from scratch. If you'd like us to make a site visit, please fill out the form at remcoproducts.com/contact/#site-visit or direct any questions to cs@remcoproducts.com.