

**Title:** Color-Coding In a Food Processing Facility: It Starts with Hue

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Implementing a color-coded system in your food facility is a safe, easy way to assist with hygiene zone and/or allergen separation throughout your operation. Color coding tools and supplies help ensure finished products (and customers) are protected from cross-contamination by microorganisms or by unlabeled allergens. A color-coding system assigns colors for specific purposes (e.g., red for unpasteurized, black for cleaning floors and drains, green for ready-to-eat product contact surfaces...) to minimize the chance of cross-contamination. By delineating your tools with a specific color, you create an easily understood and easy-to-spot system that keeps tools in areas where they are supposed to be and doing the jobs they are intended to do. Color coded supplies are readily available from a number of vendors and include brushes, cleaning tools, product handling, apparel, tool racks, and many more items used in your operation.

The benefits of color-coding are easy to understand if you picture a chaotic day at a restaurant kitchen. When you're in the kitchen, you need tools to help make sure you're keeping everyone safe so you may assign the color red to cutting boards, knives, containers for products that are raw (e.g., raw chicken) vs. another color like blue for surfaces and tools where ready-to-eat food is being prepared. It's a quick, easy way for busy employees to stay organized, keep food safe, and ensure finished product quality. The concept is the same in the food processing environment but at a larger scale. Whether its during production or when cleaning it is imperative to ensure hygienic and allergen separation to protect your customers.

The great news is that you can easily customize a system that caters to your particular needs and operation. There are several suppliers of color-coded tools who can also help you when you implement your system. Here are a few key thoughts to consider from a supplier we work with here at Nelson-Jameson, Remco:

1. Keep it simple. Limit the number of colors you use, maybe 3-5 for small to medium facilities. For larger facilities, keep the number of colors each individual has to remember to that same small range.
2. Avoid complicated color assignments. Having very customized tools - like a green broom with a blue handle for specific zone/allergen combo - may seem like a good idea, but it will inevitably lead to confusion and chaos. Simplicity and instant recognition are very important.
3. Roll out the program all at once - This will help in avoiding confusion. Make all tool changes at one time, along with an education program and a widely announced start date for the new transition.
4. Use signage for reinforcement. Don't leave room for ambiguity with color-coding. Let signs, in however many languages, to remind workers which color is assigned to which zone.

Consider what's best for your facility and the products you make. Customize your program for the greatest impact. In addition to improving safety and quality, you'll likely also enjoy new efficiencies and workflow improvements.