



REMINDER TO FOOD MANUFACTURERS: ARE YOU COMPLIANT WITH FDA COMPRESSED AIR TESTING REQUIREMENTS?

By Rich Huguenor



Each year, an estimated 48 million people in the U.S. get sick from foodborne diseases, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In 2011, the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) was signed into law by President Obama to help ensure the U.S. food supply is safe by shifting the focus to preventing contamination of the food supply, rather than responding to it.

When Rev 8.1 of the FDA Food Code went into effect in 2019, it mandated that all FDA-regulated food, beverage and packaging companies test their compressed air system annually. Safe Quality Food (SQF), BRC, GFSI, and FSMA all mandate testing of compressed air systems that come directly or indirectly into contact with your product.

On May 24, 2021, Rev 9 of the FDA Food Code goes into effect, making this an opportune time to remind food, beverage and packaging users to comply with these testing requirements.

The following text is cited directly from the SQF *Food Safety Code: Food Manufacturing, Edition 9*.

11.5.5 AIR AND OTHER GASES

11.5.5.1 Compressed air or other gases (e.g., nitrogen or carbon dioxide) that contact food or food contact surfaces shall be clean and present no risk to food safety.

11.5.5.2 Compressed air systems and systems used to store or dispense other gases that come into contact with

food or food contact surfaces shall be maintained and regularly monitored for quality and applicable food safety hazards. The frequency of analysis shall be risk-based and at a minimum annually.

Additionally, the Food Safety Code defines Compressed Air Monitoring as “A program that includes particles, water, oil, microbiological, and relevant gaseous testing in compressed air or other gases. A verification of the effectiveness of compressor maintenance and filtration that a management facility has in place.”

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU?

SQF requirements include compressed air purity testing for the food, beverage and packaging industry. The SQF code specifies that compressed air used in the manufacturing process shall be clean and present no risk to food safety, and compressed air used in the manufacturing process shall be regularly (annually, at minimum) monitored for purity. Risk-based food safety programs are unique to each manufacturing facility and guidelines are non-specific.

SQF Compressed Air Purity is critical for manufacturers to provide food products and packaging that are not only cost-effective to process but also safe to eat or drink.

WHAT IS THE TESTING STANDARD?

The FDA has not established a clear standard, so most testing labs and food producers follow guidelines from ISO 8573-1 and leave it up to the food manufacturers to select the quality level that best suits the product they are making and/or that is appropriate to their facility. ISO 8573 specifies purity classes with respect to particles, water and oil.

A previous Sullair blog, The ABC's and 1-2-3s of Air Quality Classes, can help you determine which may be best for your facility.

HOW IS TESTING CONDUCTED?

Companies like TRI Air Testing, an independent analytical testing laboratory, helps many food, beverage and packaging companies test their compressed air. SQF Managers use compressed air testing equipment provided by TRI to collect compressed air samples as part of their facilities' air quality compliance, safety and SQF food safety programs. TRI sends the kit to the customer; the customer takes a sample and sends it back to TRI's lab. The testing is easy-to-use and requires no prior training.

Results are produced within 24 hours and are available online. The report indicates what they found, without any comparisons to an acceptable baseline, and the customer decides if the test results indicate risk.

WRAPPING IT UP

On May 24, 2021, Rev 9 of the FDA Food Code goes into effect. Remember to schedule your annual testing requirements to ensure you're compliant with FDA compressed air testing requirements.

Additionally, it may be time to rethink your compressed air system altogether. Could you benefit from an oil free compressed air system? Refer to our previous blog on why oil free air is critical in the food and beverage industry. Many food and beverage customers are now choosing to not introduce oil in the first place, thereby minimizing their risk of production downtime, product spoilage or even reputation of their brand.

Partner with your local authorized distributor and a testing company to ensure your compressed air system is compliant.

SOURCES:

TRI Air Testing: <https://airtesting.com/sqf-air-purity/>