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Drink Up!

Roger Goldstein

Beverage System Management

Beverage systems require proper and regular maintenance to ensure tasty, sanitary beverages for guests

As those in the restaurant industry know, beverage systems require regular maintenance for the safety of the consumer and to ensure the reliable operation of equipment.

Often, the equipment or product supplier performs the maintenance for these systems. However, restaurant personnel also can conduct the task. Regardless of who performs the service, all restaurant operators should understand the process.

The first step is to understand the importance of regular beverage system maintenance. A clean and efficiently running beverage system is vital to each restaurant's operation:

- Contributes to food and employee safety
- Maximizes equipment performance and reduces downtime
- Reduces repair costs over the equipment's lifecycle
- Allows service calls to be budgeted evenly over time
- Helps ensure manufacturer warranty

Soft Drink Maintenance

Let's consider a carbonated soft drink system and review key areas that require maintenance.

Water filtration maintenance is always recommended as it directly impacts the taste and safety of the beverage. Don't wait until the flow rate drops or the beverage begins to taste bad. Filters must be changed per manufacturer recommendation.

Dispensing nozzles are exposed to air, which can lead to sticky buildup and bacteria growth. Daily removal and cleaning are recommended.

An ice bin or cold well cools the product with a cold plate. Often this ice is also served to the customer. Therefore, periodic cleaning is necessary. The bin drain must also be kept clear as water buildup will prevent proper heat transfer on the cold plate and impact the cleanliness of the ice.

These three items are easily maintained by in-house staff. Create a schedule and a checklist to ensure regular maintenance and best practices are followed.

System Checks

Now, let's discuss system checks. To prevent costly breakdowns and lost sales:

- Inspect the product system: Check all visible sections of soda lines for leaks or damage.
- Test carbonation levels: Check the carbonation levels against water pH levels.
- Perform a leak test on the gas system: Leak test the gas supply regulator, low pressure regulators (adjust if necessary), BIB pumps and/or canister connections.
- Calibrate the dispensing ratio: Check and adjust water and soda water flow rates and calibrate the syrup-to-water ratio.

Schedule It Out

There are many components of a beverage system to maintain. Using a schedule and checklist can make the task more manageable.

The following is a sample schedule:

- Periodic maintenance for soft drink equipment.
- Daily care and cleaning of dispensing stations.
- Test product temperature and taste.
- Inspect beverage conduits (soda lines) every four months.
- Inspect for damage and keep insulated.
- Inspect floor chase and seals as needed.
- Change water filters quarterly or as recommended by filter manufacturer.
- Verify incoming and outgoing pressures meet manufacturer specification.
- Inspect for leaks or damage.
- Check the syrup supply daily.
- Keep all connections and BIB area clean using mild soap and water.
- Inspect lines for proper flavor labels quarterly, and clean the connector (after unhooking from syrup box) with warm soapy water and rinse.
- Check the CO2 gas supply quarterly.
- Check for proper outlet pressure.
- Check for proper syrup regulator pressure and adjust as needed.

Some beverage systems use refrigerated water/glycol baths and chilled lines to cool the product. These components will fall into a similar schedule and should be maintained on a regular basis to ensure reliable service.

Maintaining Beer Systems

Although beer systems have many of the same components as soft drink systems, they are more complex and the product is more sensitive to proper temperature pressures and cleaning.

Beer lines may require more frequent cleaning and flushing— possibly even daily. The schedule is predicated by the product and conditions of the site.

Further Considerations

Improper maintenance of a beverage system can lead to serious equipment failures and health safety issues. The maintenance items mentioned here are intended to be general and give an idea of what is required for basic care. Consult the system supplier for proper equipment servicing requirements and recommendations. Often, the manufacturer will provide detailed maintenance programs, educational materials and service programs.

Lastly, if your restaurant is installing a new beverage system, ensure the elements of the install consider access to all critical components of the system. For example, water filters are usually hidden in a closet or mounted high on a wall, which means they may be overlooked. Also, if the beverage system can't access the drain and supply lines, the installation may require additional labor and expense. And finally, whether beverage lines run above or below ground, they must be well insulated and protected from dirt, water and chemicals.

Always remember that beverages and ice are consumed by customers and must be treated with care. Proper equipment maintenance can prevent costly repairs and loss of service and, more importantly, offers a tasty and sanitary beverage for your guests to enjoy.

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