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Placing chemical indicators; automated washer inspection check list

by Ray Taurasi

Q Our policy for the use of chemical indicators is vague – it just states to place a chemical indicator in all peel pouches, wrapped or containerized sets and other packages. The policy also says to

place a CI on each level of multi-tier sets. As a result, the CIs are placed in different locations depending upon who prepares the set. It seems to me it would be better if everyone put the CIs in the same spot so that the nurses in the OR would know where to find them. Does it matter where they are as long as they are on each level and in each pack?

A AAMI recommendation 10.5 addresses the use of chemical indicators and states that a CI should be used within each package, tray or sterilization container to be sterilized. The internal indicator should be either a class 3, 4, 5, or 6 chemical indicator. The appropriate use and placement of chemical indicators within a packaging device is essential to effectively monitor the sterilization process. The placement of the indicator

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should indeed be incorporated into your procedure for each type of packaging device and item that you package for sterilization. Each and every employee should precisely follow the procedure. AAMI notes that the CI should be placed in the area of the package, tray or containment device considered to present the greatest challenge to sterilant penetration. Contrary to what many believe, the center is not always the most challenging spot in a package, tray or containment device. Material composition, design, and tray configuration are some of the factors that affect the permeability of sterilants, and for that reason you must refer to the manufacturer's instructions for the use and placement of CIs in their packaging material or system.

Q My supervisor recently returned from a seminar on cleaning verification and monitoring the performance of automated washers. The speaker stated that it was important to conduct an inspection of washers prior to running daily cleaning verification tests. My supervisor has asked me to revise our procedures to include the inspection. Could you provide some advice on what items should be included in an inspection check list?

A To maximize the efficient performance of processing equipment such as washer disinfectors, it is very important to conduct regular inspections of the equipment and its parts. It is also very important to remember that the washer racks are also pieces of processing equipment and need to be carefully maintained and inspected prior to use.

Below is a listing of some of the key points you might want to consider in the development of your inspection check list.

- Spray nozzles are free from any debris or occlusions - Visually inspect all spray nozzles on the washer racks and in the washer chamber. If any of the nozzle holes are occluded, the water flow and pressure can be impeded adversely affecting the washer's performance. The washer water is re-circulated during the cycle and it carries soiled matter with it which may get lodged in the sprayer arms. The spray arms need to be cleaned regularly.
- Holes in the spray arms are directed at the target surface - Some washers have spray arms that may become loose during use and turn causing the spray to be misdirected from the instruments. Most spray arms have holes on two sides; the holes should be directed straight up and down.
- All spray arms are present - As strange as this may sound, I can't tell you how many hospitals I have gone into and found spray arms completely missing and yet the machines are still being used. If a spray arm is missing the washer cannot function properly and should not be used. I have often found the missing spray arms in the instrument orphanage for unidentified surgical instruments.
- Spray arms spin freely - Test spray arms to be certain they spin smoothly and evenly.
- Drain screens at bottom of washer are free of debris - The drain screens at the bottom of the washer chamber capture debris from the sets. The screens need to be removed and cleaned at least daily or more frequently depending on use.
- Instrument rack coupling aligns properly with manifold - Be certain that the washer water/solution supply inlets align properly with the washer rack manifold. If misaligned, water flow, distribution and pressure will be affected and will not allow the washer to function properly. Inadequate water pressure will

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prevent the spinner arms from moving properly. Also, inadequate water pressure diminishes the mechanical cleaning action.

- Spray arm bushings are present and not damaged - Be certain that all bushings, couplers, washers and the like are present and free of any cracks or damage.
- Detergent /chemistry delivery lines are clear and functional - Visually inspect all detergent and other chemistry delivery lines and connection ports: Be certain they are clear, clean and free of any occlusions, air entrapment and kinks. Also inspect tubing for any signs of wear, breaks or leaks. If there are defects in the delivery lines, cleaning agents and proper concentration levels may not be administered and the wash cycle will be ineffective.
- Check all chemical, detergent levels are adequate - Be certain that all detergents and other chemical containers are at adequate supply levels and confirm that the delivery dispensing lines are properly connected to the correct container.
- Observe overall condition of washer - Internal chamber walls and surfaces should be clean and free of stains, scaling and any other signs of soil build up. These are signs of problems that may affect the efficacy of the washer's performance and cleaning outcome. Stains and scaling may be indicative of problems such as water quality, excessive chemistry concentrations and the like. Be certain that any applicable gaskets, seals, recorders are in order and proper condition.
- Verify that the chamber light is working - Washers have windows and internal lights to allow you to observe their performance during the cycle. During the cycle you should observe that spin arms are moving as they should, that no instruments or trays are interfering with the washer's performance. Observe for water flow and that there are no signs of over-sudsing, etc. **HPN**

Ray Taurasi is Eastern Regional Director of Clinical Sales and Services for [Healthmark Industries](#). His healthcare career spans over three decades as an Administrator, Educator, Technologist and Consultant. He is a member of AORN, AHA, SGNA, AAMI and a past president of IAHCSSM and has served on and contributed to many national committees with a myriad of professional organizations, manufacturers, corporations and prestigious healthcare networks. Taurasi has been a faculty member of numerous colleges teaching in the divisions of business administration and health sciences. In addition to this column he has authored several articles and has been a featured speaker on the international scene.

