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Tracking Cleaning Effectiveness: What You Need to Know About ATP Monitoring Systems

By Matt Smith, Marketing Analyst, Healthmark Industries Co. | September 08, 2011

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The following article is written by Matt Smith, marketing analyst for Healthmark Industries Co.

Healthcare Environmental Services Week is quickly approaching (it begins Sept. 11) and I couldn't think of a better time to write about the importance of taking measures to track effective cleaning in the workplace environment, including surfaces such as door knobs, bed rails, stretchers, OR tables, etc.

Preventing infections in the healthcare environment has become an increasing concern in recent years. Now more than ever it is imperative to effectively track the results of sanitation efforts in the work place.

ATP monitoring systems

ATP (adenosine triphosphate) monitoring systems are some of the newest and most exciting methods facilities are using to monitor their sanitation efforts. When utilized with accompanying data processing software, results can be tracked and analyzed over time to document improving performance. The procedure starts by defining a test plan in the software.

The science behind ATP sanitation monitoring systems is two chemicals — luciferin and luciferase — combining with ATP in their cells to produce light. This reaction, referred to as bioluminescence when it's in nature, and chemiluminescence, when incorporated into a commercial product, is the basic principal of all ATP sanitation monitoring systems.

The second major element of an ATP sanitation monitoring system is the use of a luminometer to measure the light produced by the reaction of ATP with luciferin and luciferase. The luminometer contains a device, either a photo-multiplier or photo-diode, which detects the amount of light that is being produced from the chemiluminescent reaction occurring in the sampling process.

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The procedure is to sample a surface with the supplied sampler. Within the sampler, the collected sample is mixed with the activating chemicals. The luminometer measures the resulting light. The more ATP collected, the more relative light units (RLUs) the luminometer will report. RLU results are typically reported in a matter of seconds.

Not a perfect single solution

Even though ATP is a good tool for monitoring surface cleanliness, users must remember it does not detect everything. ATP is in living eukaryotic (animal) cells and in self-replicating prokaryotic (microbial) cells. ATP is not present in viruses nor is it present in biological components such as protein, carbohydrate, hemoglobin and lipids. Thus, if after cleaning ATP is found on a surface, it indicates there are still living microorganisms or viable human cells present. Remember that ATP is not specific to any one organism. Also remember that RLU values from one brand of ATP system does not necessarily equate to those in another.

ATP sanitation monitoring is a quick and simple tool for healthcare facilities to monitor the effectiveness of their cleaning efforts on surfaces. It helps the staff follow a process that determines when a properly sanitized working environment has been achieved, resulting in a safer environment for patients and healthcare workers alike.

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