

The Benefits of Digital Quality Checklists

By: Eric Moore, Director of Food Safety and Regulatory Compliance, Testo North America

I have spent countless hours over the years creating and revising paper-based temperature logs and daily checklists designed to help manage essential food safety daily requirements. As a food safety professional, I took great pride in designing these documents. However, no matter how well designed, there were always challenges to getting operations to use them. While visiting locations I would often speak with employees and supervisors about the importance of the logs and checklists but more importantly I asked questions about challenges with using the them. Occasionally, I would be provided with some truly valuable insights into why as long as I had to rely on paper-based records, the food safety program would have limited success.

“No one ever looks at them, they just sit in my folder until a manager is getting ready for an inspection. There are so many other things that I could be doing with my time right now, like helping customers.”

Comments like these are what helped me understand why paper-based safety management programs have and will always come up short as well as how they can have a negative impact on employee engagement and your food safety culture. Whether it's a refrigeration log or specific checklist related to food safety or product quality, there is valuable information being captured. When this information isn't acted upon employees start to realize this and consider these important documents to be a waste of time. Once this starts to happen, the validity of an organization's program becomes questionable, and a false sense of security can become the prevailing mindset.

One way to course correct is through use of a technology-based food safety management system. Over the years I had success using various parts of technology-based systems like digital temperature monitoring systems and self-inspection software, but these were always tools that only I had access to and they were not integrated. I still had to spend countless hours reviewing spreadsheets and generating reports to provide to leadership. However, the systems on the market today have the functionality to do it all. They automatically monitor storage temperatures, IoT enabled hand-held instruments and equipment that measure, record, and analyze results against your pre-defined critical limits.



Specific
Measurable
Goal
Achievable
Realistic
Timely



Just imagine how this can improve any retail or food service manager or supervisor's ability to do his or her job better. In the past, these individuals had to spend valuable time at the beginning of the day retrieving and then reviewing the previous day or weeks paperwork. This information is now readily available in a report anywhere they have internet access. So now that same manger/supervisor can quickly identify where his or her time is needed the most, or better yet where to go and provide positive reinforcement on a job well done and seeking feedback on how the system can be improved even more.

I truly feel that technology-based solutions are the missing ingredient that food safety program managers in the retail and foodservice industry have been in search of for years. It's our responsibility to protect our customers health and to do better. Technology is the key to our industry's success in preventing unnecessary foodborne illness by providing the right tools that enable an effective way to measure results, react faster, and make continuous improvements.



About Eric Moore:

Eric Moore is the Director of Food Safety and Regulatory Compliance at Testo North America. For the last 15 years, Eric has been a proactive leader in improving the food safety education, policies and procedures at multiple industry-leading food service and retail organizations. Currently, Eric provides organizational leadership and guidance as the food safety subject matter expert and for Testo North America, and oversees all aspects of compliance and regulatory policy.