



HELPING TO DEFINE HYGIENE STANDARDS FOR THE COMMERCIAL LAUNDERING INDUSTRY



Founded in 1889, AlSCO was the first company to introduce linen and

uniform rental services to the world. Today, with over 170 branches worldwide, AlSCO is the leading provider of rental, leasing and laundry services for linens and uniforms, as well as washroom and hygiene products.

AlSCO earned certification for 69 facilities to the NSF protocol P413: Hygienically Clean Napery in Commercial Laundering Operations and has recently certified the first of its facilities to NSF P467: Hygienically Clean Healthcare Textiles. AlSCO staff also served on both protocol development panels.



THE CHALLENGE

AlSCO sought third-party napery certification as a way to meet customer demand and to differentiate its service, only to discover no such certification existed. "We found our restaurant clientele was interested in hygienically clean linens, based on concerns expressed by their customers. We approached NSF International to see if there was interest in developing a protocol because we were familiar with NSF's nonfood compounds registration of hand sanitizers and, many years ago, a number of companies in our industry had NSF certification for cloth roll towels," said Liz Jennings, Marketing Manager for AlSCO. (NSF International has a 70-year history in developing public health standards and protocols for the food, drinking water and consumer products industries.)

THE SOLUTION

To address the industry need for napery certification, NSF International convened a protocol development panel to define specific, consensus-based criteria for certifying commercial laundering operations' effectiveness in consistently disinfecting and cleaning linens and fabrics used in hospitality and foodservice operations to be free from disease-causing bacteria and pathogens. AlSCO staff, including Senior Marketing Manager Cecele Cox, served on this panel, along with representatives from other industry, regulatory and academic organizations, following NSF's transparent process that includes broad stakeholder representation to ensure the resulting protocol is protective of public health.

Cox says, "The development process involved balanced input from various stakeholders. We defined the requirements and criteria to be rigorous and scientifically valid for producing hygienic linens, but we also took industry laundering processes into consideration. We did not want to impose cost or process burdens by requiring unduly complex processes or the acquisition of new machinery."

As part of the protocol development process, NSF staff observed the critical control points in place at AlSCO's Chicago plant, which included laundering time, temperatures, chemical use, product packaging and transportation. This process was reviewed by the protocol development panel and incorporated as part of the protocol requirements.

Over a one-year period, each of AlSCO's 69 facilities became certified to the napery protocol as part of a corporate initiative. To earn certification, AlSCO underwent a desk audit, on-site facility audits and product testing. First, NSF reviewed AlSCO's organizational management system, including which control points in the laundering process are documented, monitored and audited. NSF



auditors then visited AlSCO laundering facilities to ensure compliance with the certification program, including on-site inspections of the entire laundering process from wash resources to the wash procedure to the handling of the final product. Finally, NSF performed microbiological testing on samples of laundered products to confirm the repeatability and validity of the laundering facility's effectiveness in removing harmful pathogens and bacteria. The samples were tested for counts of the total aerobic plate, yeast and mold, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and *E. coli*. To ensure ongoing compliance, product testing and audits will be conducted at all AlSCO facilities in a five-year rotation.

Later, as a result of a healthcare customer request, AlSCO also decided to pursue certification for hygienically clean healthcare textiles, which didn't exist at that time. Cox again served on the panel to develop NSF P467: Hygienically Clean Healthcare Textiles for towels and sheets used in the healthcare industry. This protocol is similar to P413 for napery, but since healthcare settings have higher sanitation needs, it has more stringent testing limits, more frequent testing and auditing, and requires facilities to complete a risk assessment of their laundering process. This risk assessment requires evaluating potential risks that could impact the hygienic cleanliness of healthcare textiles and documenting the steps taken to mitigate those risks on a consistent basis. P467 also requires bi-annual product testing and annual facility audits.

Jennings says both certification processes went smoothly. "We can't say enough about NSF's product certification and business unit managers. They made the process easy, working directly with our plant managers to help them understand what the audit would involve. If there were any snags, they helped them understand what needed to be resolved."

In addition, AlSCO found NSF's secure web portal an excellent way to share information. Jennings says, "We could access the audit standards for each plant so our General Managers could review the requirements ahead of time. During the protocol development process, any changes were posted for team review. NSF auditors also log results in the portal, which is a great way for everyone to be on the same page. The online system also contains a list of our equipment, and a way to easily upload new

details if we replace any machines."

AlSCO's laundering process varies among locations, based on plant equipment and layout, and the protocol is able to accommodate plant-specific criteria. "This flexibility has been key for our business," Jennings says.



THE RESULTS

AlSCO's napery certification has seen positive feedback from its clients and the industry overall. Jennings says, "The NSF mark, which we have added to our website, social media, catalogs and delivery trucks, is a positive touch point. It's great cobranding and helps us promote our brand. Our customers receive a plaque to display in their restaurants, which helps imbue clientele and health inspector confidence. This signage, with the NSF mark, helps our customers communicate to their customers that the linens are hygienically clean, which helps generate a positive image for their business."

NSF certification has been a key point of differentiation in AlSCO securing several restaurant clients. In one instance, an executive chef in Fort Collins instructed his staff to prominently place the plaque so all customers could see it, and reported that the certification will greatly help him with health inspections. In another example, staff at a retirement home in Santa Clarita wanted the most sanitary products for its elderly clients and was very impressed with the certification.

For details about NSF's Commercial Laundering Certification Program, contact Ashlee Breitner at textilecert@nsf.org or visit nsf.org.

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