



## **Episode Six- Handwash stations**

Welcome to episode 6 of Food Safety Bites Brought to you the University of Wisconsin Madison, and funded by the USDA Food Safety Outreach Program, this is your host Harriet Behar. This episode is **setting up a handwashing facility**. In these podcast episodes, I will identify issues, and provide suggestions for how to reduce various fresh produce contamination risks and keep your customers safe. We will not talk in detail about what is required for a GAP audit or a FSMA inspection. If you want more information on those, please see the links on the website where you found these podcasts.

**Setting up a good handwashing facility** need not be expensive, and there are many good examples on the internet for both stationary facilities and those you can bring out to the field. Plan to setup the water and soap so there is minimal touching of the spigots and pumps. If you can choose a water spigot that runs freely when you open it versus one where you have to hold down a spigot to keep the water running, the first type is better, so you both hands free to wash. You can also use clean towels to reduce potential for cross contamination by using a paper towel to turn off the spigot when you are done.

Most farms will need numerous facilities so whenever someone needs to wash their hands, there is a handwash station nearby. It is fairly easy to setup a stationary hand wash station near the restroom or pack shed, especially if there is plumbing and you truly have running water, but plumbing is not essential. Having a portable one that goes out to the fields with the crew is highly recommended, have it on the wagon, in the pickup, or whatever vehicle goes with the crew. Have someone each day make sure there is enough water, soap and towels as well as the catch basin. It is strongly suggested that you have handwashing stands in some key locations on the farm: outside of the bathroom, in the pack shed, ideally near the door, and a portable handwashing unit on a vehicle or in the field so that you can access it when you are harvesting and working in the field.

If you have a big crew where numerous folks may need to wash their hands at the same time- have more than one handwash station. Make it easy for the crew to wash their hands, don't have people waiting in line or they may skip the hand wash step.

**How to setup an effective handwashing system.** Good hand washing protocols are based in common sense. The basic equipment needed provides for the use of water, soap, clean towels, a dirty towel receptacle and a water catch basin. I will go over each item. To have effective hand washing, you need to have running water. It doesn't have to be pressured water from a sink or hydrant. You can use a container with a spigot, full of drinkable water. Water from a creek, river or pond is not considered drinkable and cannot be used for hand washing since that water could be contaminated with who knows what. Think of clean water for hand washing as a single use. Don't dunk your hands in a bucket or a bowl-because the next person who uses that water, or if you dunk your hands a second time, are now using contaminated water.



**The water container** should be food grade, like a large water cooler that people use at picnics. It is best to use an opaque container, and it can be food grade plastic or metal. Clear containers that hold water for extended periods of time in the sun, can develop some algae and contaminate the water. Avoid using glass for holding the water, and you should avoid glass for washing or drinking water, since glass can easily be broken and can then result in a serious risk to food and physical safety from wide-spread shards. It is also best to start with a new water container, rather than repurposing one that had previously held food, food ingredients, or cleaning chemicals. Plastic is porous and it could be difficult to entirely clean out all residue of previous liquids, especially if the container has a narrow opening that makes scrubbing difficult.

A spigot that does not need to be held open in order for the water to run, should be chosen. Remember effective hand washing needs the use of two hands, and each person should be able to use the handwash station without someone else holding the water open for them. The container should also have closed top, so dirt, bird droppings etc. will not contaminate the water.

**The soap** should be in a hand pump or other type of dispenser, rather than a bar of soap. This soap is single use, like the water, and has less of a chance of passing on dirt to the next user. If your soap doesn't lather well in cool water, try another brand.

**A catch basin** is needed so the water you just used to clean your hands after going to the bathroom doesn't splash on your shoes or pants and then you walk into the produce field, spreading whatever bacteria you just washed off your hands. You also don't want that water to run into the field where the produce is growing or make a puddle where others can pick up that water on their shoes before they walk into the field. Pour the catch basin water on grass, trees or other ornamental flowers, but don't put it on vegetables or dump it in a way that could pose a contamination risk of running back into your vegetable beds.

**The towels used for drying hands** should be single use. They could be cloth if you only use them once and then wash them. Think about setting up paper towel dispensers that have the person touch only the towel they are using or rolls of paper towels that will unwind so the paper towel used separates from the main roll without touching that main roll, so there will not be muddy fingerprints on a paper towel for the next user. While not the most important aspect of the paper towels, a softer towel is more pleasant to use and more flexible to truly dry between the fingers, than one that is very stiff and not malleable.

**A receptacle for the dirty towels** should be present as well, with a lid that swings closed, or uses a foot lever that opens and shuts it. Avoiding the touching of the container with the used towels and preventing them from blowing around the field is what you are trying to accomplish.

**Having some single use drinking cups** is also a good idea, since that water is potable and could be used by workers when out in the field and these can be disposed of in the same container as the dirty towels.

**The transportation of the portable handwash stations** can be somewhat of a challenge and each farm can develop a system that works well for them. Having the handwash station



permanently located on a harvest wagon, tied in place so the various items don't roll around, is one way. Putting everything in a large tub, water container, soap, towels, and empty catch basin, makes it easy to move the hand wash station between various types of transport to the field. Make sure the water can run into the catch basin, and the soap and towels are setup to be easy to use. Having these temporary hand wash stations setup around your fields also works, as long as you can keep the towels dry, and there is a system to keep them stocked with the essentials from day to day.

So that's it for this episode of Food Safety Bites, the next episode is injuries, illness and bodily fluids this is your host Harriet Behar brought to you by the University of Wisconsin Madison, talk to you next time!