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SQF Environmental Monitoring Checklist for Pet Food Sites

Intended Use: Internal facility verification; not a replacement for SQF certification requirements.

Purpose

This checklist helps pet food manufacturers verify that their facility's environmental monitoring (EM) program is effective, risk-based, and aligned with the SQF Code. Use it to review program design, sampling sites, frequency, corrective actions, and recordkeeping.

This document provides a checklist for pet food manufacturers to verify the effectiveness and compliance of their environmental monitoring (EM) programs with the Safe Quality Food (SQF) Code and Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) standards. It covers objectives, facility zoning, sampling plans, laboratory testing, corrective actions, recordkeeping, and optional verification aids.

• **Program Objectives and Responsibilities**:

The EM program must have documented objectives such as verifying sanitation and detecting pathogens, with a designated program owner, annual management reviews, and training for personnel collecting samples. Positive swab findings are indicators of a working program and the plan should be reviewed after facility or process changes.

• **Facility Zoning and Sampling Frequency**: The facility is divided into four zones based on risk, from direct product-contact surfaces (Zone 1) sampled weekly to distant areas (Zone 4) sampled quarterly. Sampling sites and frequencies should be adjusted according to product risk and historical findings.

• **Corrective Actions and Recordkeeping**: Positive environmental findings require investigation, root cause analysis, corrective actions like cleaning or retraining, and verification of their effectiveness. All sampling records, lab reports, and CAPA documentation must be maintained and included in management reviews, with outcomes shared across teams to support continuous improvement.

1. Program Objectives & Responsibilities

Review Item	Yes/No	Notes / Responsible Person
EM program documented with defined objectives (e.g., verify sanitation effectiveness, detect pathogens, trend data).		
Program owner or coordinator identified (e.g., QA/FSQA Manager).		
EM program reviewed at least annually by management.		
Training provided for personnel collecting samples.		

2. Facility Zoning (Based on Risk)

Tip: Adjust frequency based on product risk and previous positive findings.

Zone	Description	Example Surfaces	Sampling Frequency	Reviewed
Zone 1	Direct product-contact surfaces	Mixers, packaging conveyors, hoppers	Weekly / per production cycle	
Zone 2	Adjacent non-contact surfaces	Equipment frames, control panels, drip shields	Biweekly	
Zone 3	Non-contact but within processing area	Floors, walls, forklifts, door handles	Monthly	
Zone 4	Distant areas	Locker rooms, hallways, offices	Quarterly	

3. Sampling Plan Design

Review Item	Yes/No	Notes
Sampling sites selected based on risk and historical data.		
Number of swabs per zone documented.		
Rotation plan in place to cover entire facility over time.		
Sampling performed pre-op or during production, as defined in plan.		
Sampling methods and materials (sponges, swabs, air plates) documented.		

4. Laboratory Testing & Verification

Review Item	Yes/No	Notes
Laboratory accredited (ISO 17025 or equivalent).		
Target organisms defined (e.g., Salmonella, Listeria, indicator organisms).		
Turnaround times and reporting protocols established.		
Results reviewed and trended by QA/FSQA.		

5. Corrective and Preventive Actions (CAPA)

Review Item	Yes/No	Notes
Positive findings trigger investigation and resampling plan.		
Root cause analysis performed and documented.		
Corrective actions implemented (cleaning, repair, retraining).		
Effectiveness of corrective actions verified.		
Trends analyzed to prevent recurrence.		

6. Recordkeeping & Management Review

Review Item	Yes/No	Notes
Sampling records, lab reports, and CAPA documentation maintained and traceable.		
EM data included in management review meetings.		
EM program outcomes shared with sanitation and operations teams.		
Continuous improvement documented (e.g., reduced positives, improved trend stability).		

7. Optional Verification Aids

☐ Environmental swab site map updated quarterly.
☐ Trend graph of positive vs. negative results.
☐ Annual EM program audit completed.
☐ Review against SQF Code 11.7.1 and GFSI Benchmarking Requirements (v2024).

Final Review Summary

Review Date	Reviewed By	Key Findings	Follow-Up Actions

Tips for Success

• Finding a positive swab is not a failure—it's a sign your program is working.
• Review your EM plan after any facility changes, new product introductions, or sanitation system updates.
• Reinforce a food safety culture where data drives decisions, not fear of detection.

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