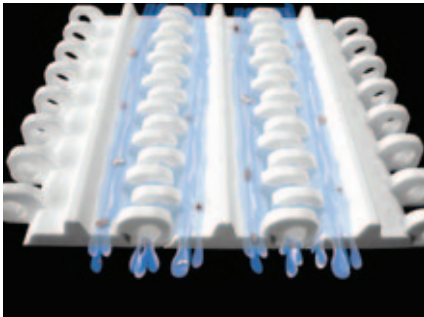


Critical conveyor control

The food processor's dilemma: how to provide top-level hygiene and reduce the risk of contamination, while remaining competitive? The answer may lie in the conveyor belt.



HabasisLINK® is designed for easy cleaning

The food industry constantly wrestles with the issues of hygiene and food safety. Processors struggle to combine the highest level of hygiene and reduced risk of microbiological contamination, with the ultimate aim of remaining competitive and controlling costs.

The issue of hygiene is especially relevant for conveyor belts. In direct contact with

food, they have to comply with international food regulations, be easy to clean and fulfil different processing requirements without damaging the goods that are being processed. By making an informed belt choice, a processor can lower production costs and raise safety standards.

HACCP compliance

Food conveyor belts can support the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) concept and thus minimise the client's critical control points. Guaranteed hygiene and conformity with food safety standards can be achieved by including certain features in the conveyor belt:

- ❖ Calender technology, which ensures the surfaces of the conveyor belt are sealed and non-porous. Smooth surfaces improve protection against bacteria or microorganisms.
- ❖ Reverse side coating, impregnation processes and HySEAL edge sealing, which ensure a completely sealed, hygienic conveyor belt. In this way, no contamination (oils, fats, product particles) or moisture can penetrate the surface of the tensile carrier.
- ❖ Antistatic finish, which reduces the build-up of dust and dirt.
- ❖ Moisture and temperature resistance, which makes the conveyor belts easy to clean. They comply with regulations from the EU, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).
- ❖ Blue coatings and edge sealing, which improve product safety. The colour blue rarely occurs naturally in food, so the contamination of goods caused by belt abrasion can be easily identified on the production line.

The conveyor belt manufacturer Habasit's offering includes all of the above, along with technical support. Thus, its food conveyor belts reduce risks and minimise critical control points.

Conformity with food safety standards

Machinery and equipment, accessories (conveyor belts, for example) and cleaning equipment for the food industry may be described as parts of a low-risk system if they:

- ❖ Adhere to food regulations (FDA, EU, USDA and so on)
- ❖ Use materials that are harmless to human health
- ❖ Are designed to conform with hygiene requirements – smooth surfaces (no blind spots), no dead areas or corners in which product and micro-organisms can be harboured, easy to clean

Manufacturers of the products involved must be able to provide evidence, through certificates and safety datasheets, that they meet the legal requirements. In the conveyor belt industry, this relates to the manufacturers of the raw materials (such as cloth and plastic components), while the actual manufacturer of the conveyor belts must be able to confirm the relevant conformity in a self-declaration. However, HACCP approval for machines or spare parts, in the sense of FDA, USDA or EU conformity, does not yet exist.

Cleaning is key

Hygienic design of machinery, equipment and conveyor belts is the basis for safe food production. This is not sufficient, however. Manufacturers can only ensure that their products are reliably protected against pollution and contamination through regular and proper cleaning.

For this reason, Habasit not only provides new solutions – such as Cleanline®, HabasitLINK®, antimicrobial belts (HyGUARD®) or HabaGUARD®, according to regional conformance) and the HySAN belt ranges – but has also published cleaning guidelines for all of its conveyor belts. ●

Olaf Heide is business unit manager of Habasit's food and tobacco division. Habasit is one of the leading manufacturers of conveyor and processing belts.