

Sanitary plant solutions

Zero-Loc partnered with North Star Foods to prepare its new plant for high standards of sanitation.

Keeping a meat-processing plant clean and free of contaminants starts with the basics — the structure in which the process takes place. If walls or ceilings are not properly built and sealed, harborages and leaks can crop up, making food safety and sanitation much more difficult for processors.

Zero-Loc, based in Langley, British Columbia, Canada, with another manufacturing plant in Brantford, Ontario, Canada, has the solutions to keep these basic building blocks in compliance with some of the most stringent sanitation requirements in the food-processing industries, from the inside out. From its EPS insulated panels to its Factory Laminated Fiberglass Reinforced Plastic (FRP) to its Walk-on Suspended Ceiling Systems, Zero-Loc specializes at creating a thermal envelope within a plant, resulting in a desired low-temperature building with maximum energy efficiency.

Zero-Loc panel skins can withstand frequent wash-downs of harsh processing and sanitation conditions, and they do not support the growth of contaminants. This also gives processors the option of creating a hygienic envelope in plants that require such levels of prevention.

North Star Foods, Inc., is one of the recent beneficiaries of Zero-Loc's products



and services. North Star, a new company in the process of finalizing construction of its first plant in Elk Grove Village, Ill., teamed with Zero-Loc to help its plant meet U.S. Department of Agriculture standards for meat processing.

Lee Hawkins, vice president of Eastern Sales for Zero-Loc, explains that meeting the sanitation needs of North Star was a major focus on this project. "In this facility, there was a concern over the issues of harsh wash-down conditions, corrosive elements within the rooms and sanitary issues," he says.

Zero-Loc offered North Star several options for the different areas of the plant, which will process European

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sausages and deli meats upon startup. The option best-suited for North Star's coolers and freezers, as well as those areas without corrosive elements or high wash-downs was Zero-Loc's standard prepainted white G90 galvanized steel finish, Hawkins says. Those areas that were critical of heavy wash-down and corrosive elements were constructed with 26-gauge 2B stainless-steel finish. After the panels were constructed, they were fully caulked at all joints to meet with sanitary requirements of USDA.

Donna Nowobilski, a part-owner of North Star along with her husband, John, and Richard Machnicki, says that Zero-Loc met all of the requirements they envisioned when designing the plans to convert the former warehouse into a USDA meat-processing facility. "Our first priority, obviously, was the cleanliness because it's a USDA facility," Nowobilski explains. "So, easy wash-down, clean look and cleanliness was [most important]."

Stan Tomala, architect with Tomala Associates, Inc., who managed the construction process and brought Zero-Loc to North Star after having worked with the company in the past, explains that the panels' Sleeve Joint System was a key element in North Star's decision to go with Zero-Loc.

"[Zero-Loc] offered the best service and availability of the product, as well as awareness and understanding of what their system does," he says.

Zero-Loc's tongue-in-groove Sleeve Joint Design is a fully aligned, precision-made panel connection system, allowing virtually 100% insulation to insulation contact, leaving no gaps for sludge and bacteria to collect.

The system insulates plants from air and vapor penetration, and for applications where a hygienic envelope is desired, such as at North Star, a bead of caulking protects the seam of the panel joint, producing a flush surface essential for wash-down applications.

Hawkins concurs that the machined edges and insulation-to-insulation contact makes the panels impervi-

ous to air or moisture at the joints, and says plant designers need not worry about installation.

"It is also a very easy and fast panel to install for installation crews — even those who are not experienced with it."

North Star also installed Zero-Loc's EPS panels in the service corridors of the plant and Walk-on Suspended Ceiling System in several areas of the plant, which



Tomala says offers great accessibility for service above the plant floor, minimizing contamination and food-safety risks.

Tomala raves that North Star had an easy time installing the panels, and Nowobilski says they were also impressed with the attention Zero-Loc paid to good service, making it very easy to partner with the company.

Hawkins explains that Zero-Loc was there from the beginning of construction, becoming involved early on through meetings on the layout of the plant and how North Star might benefit from different Zero-Loc panel thicknesses and finishes required to keep the plant compliant with local and USDA requirements. All in all, Nowobilski says, it was a great partnership built on Zero-Loc's great service and great products.

"They're very timely and very service-oriented. They're always there when you call," she adds. "So, they're very service-oriented, very good to deal with and very reliable. You can't ask for too much more." **NP**