Product Traceability

*Written by **Tony Reese, Arctic Glacier, Inc., & Josh Vega, Reddy Ice***

This article will focus on product traceability as it relates to packaged ice. In today's world, the complexities of supply chains and product movement are ever growing in scale and pace. Our customers and all consumers expect high quality with a fast turnaround time from the point of order. With all that said, it is even more important to have the proper safety guardrails and protocols in place in the event of potential safety risks i.e. quality control and contamination.

The aim of traceability is to protect the end user from any possible effects from a physical or biological hazard that may occur in the manufacturing process. With the outstanding work of our PIQCS committee, we have taken great strides in the industry to prevent any issues in the marketplace. From water treatment, to checking finished products with a bag melt for extraneous materials and the finished product testing from a certified laboratory. With all the precautions we have in place, there is still a chance that a product could have some type of contaminate when it leaves our facilities, thus the need for product tracing.

There are many different options to choose for coding your product. Some equipment has an embossing stamp that will code the bag as it is produced with a product code of your selection. The bag manufacturing companies will also code the bags for you by plant and a production code of your choosing. Another option is an ink jet printer that can code your bags individually as they are produced. There are even QR code generators that can be installed in line with the palletizing processes. This would allow the pallet to be scanned into the warehouse. Whichever method you choose, this is the first step in the process to ensure your product can be recalled if necessary.

The next obstacle is how to track where the product has been sold as it leaves your facility. Many of the ice delivery software companies have added the option, with each sale, to have a place to put the production code that is specific to the sale location. With a robust program, traceability can save your company from a full market recall. If you can trace each bag in a batch back to the customer to whom it was sold, it could avoid a major loss in labor and wasted product. Revisiting the in line QR scanning processes mentioned above, would allow a company to scan the pallet in to the truck loaded out and again at all customers delivered to by that pallet. If an ice company does not have the hand-held or software technology to perform this type of traceability/recall, then they have a more manual option that can be used. An example, would be to track the job numbers of all of the bags (raw material) used for that day's production onto a production sheet. This sheet would assign pallet tickets with unique sequential numbers and identification markings on each finished pallet of ice.The drivers would then deliver and potentially write the pallet ticket information on each manual ticket used until the pallet was totally consumed/sold to the customer base. This could be batched daily in an excel spreadsheet for reference.

Regardless of the measures an ice company is able to take, it is clear that traceability is no longer an option for manufacturing. It is a regulation that is put in place to protect our brand as IPIA-accredited and reassurance for the customer that the product they are purchasing is safe and of the best quality possible. As industry leaders, we must continue to lead by example and have the necessary checks and balances in place to delivery IPIA-accredited quality ice to our customers day in and day out.