

U.S. Meatpackers Test UV Air Treatment Systems in Plants



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Two of the world's largest meatpackers have installed ultraviolet air cleaning equipment in some of their U.S. processing plants. The decision comes as pressure increases on food companies to protect workers from growing concerns about airborne transmission of COVID-19.

Tyson Foods Inc. said they are doing extensive research on air flow in their facilities to better understand how it might benefit team members during the pandemic.



"We're also testing numerous new technologies to include ultraviolet air treatment systems across several of our plants," the company said in a statement. JBS USA, owned by Brazil's JBS SA and one of the four major U.S. beef processors, told Reuters that it installed "ultraviolet germicidal air sanitation" equipment in plant ventilation and air purification systems that use a specific frequency

range of light waves to kill germs.

Although it is not known whether such technologies kill the new coronavirus, research is underway to discover those answers.

These decisions to test UV air treatment systems underline the mounting pressure to protect workers in the U.S. meat industry, Reuters reported, which has seen more than 16,000 plant employees in 23 states infected with COVID-19 and 86 worker deaths related to the respiratory disease.

Low temperatures generally allow viruses to survive in the air longer. This, combined with close working conditions, add challenges for meat processors.

In Germany, a COVID-19 outbreak forced meatpacking plants to review infection risks posed by their cooling systems, Reuters reported. One meatpacker installed high-efficiency HEPA filters.

The World Health Organization last week acknowledged "evidence emerging" of the airborne spread of the novel coronavirus, Reuters reported.



While U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recommended meat companies consider ventilation options in work areas with engineers, it has not required any changes to air systems.

JBS installed "Plasma air cleaning technology" in U.S. plants that utilizes bipolar ionization to neutralize particulates in the air, including virus cells and bacteria,

Reuters reported. At this time, the company is still collecting data on how well the air treatment system works.

Some companies have chosen not to change their ventilation system because they have not seen scientific data to show the virus is spread through industrial air systems, Reuters reported.