

Cleaning Procedures

Chemical Cleaning of SecondLife RO Elements

General

The following are general recommendations for cleaning SeconLife RO Elements. More detailed procedures for cleaning a reverse osmosis (RO) system are typically included in the operating manual provided by the system supplier. It should be emphasized that frequent cleaning is not required for a properly designed and properly operated RO system however, because of the membrane’s distinct combination of pH range and temperature resistance, cleaning may be accomplished very effectively

Storage and Shipping

1. When using any chemical indicated here , follow accepted safety practices. Consult the chemical manufacturer for detailed information about safety, handling and disposal.
2. When preparing cleaning solutions, ensure that all chemicals are dissolved and well mixed before circulating the solutions through the elements.
3. It is recommended the elements be flushed with good-quality chlorine-free water (20°C minimum temperature) after cleaning. Permeate water or deionized water is recommended. Care should be taken to operate initially at reduced flow and pressure to flush the bulk of the cleaning solution from the elements before resuming normal operating pressures and flows. Despite this precaution, cleaning chemicals will be present on the permeate side following cleaning. Therefore, the permeate must be diverted to drain for at least 30 minutes or until the water is clear when starting up after cleaning.
4. During recirculation of cleaning solutions, there are temperature and pH limits. Please refer to Table 1.
5. For elements greater than 6 inches in diameter, the flow direction during cleaning must be the same as during normal operation to prevent element telescoping because the vessel thrust ring is installed only on the reject end of the vessel. This is also recommended for smaller elements. Equipment for cleaning is illustrated below.

Table 1: pH range and temperature limits during cleaning

Max Temp 50°C (122°F) pH range	Max Temp 45°C (113°F) pH range	Max Temp 35°C(95 °F) pH range	Max Temp 25°C (77°F) pH range
NOT ALLOWED	1 – 10.5	1 – 12	1 – 13

Cleaning Requirements

In normal operation, the membrane in reverse osmosis elements can become fouled by mineral scale, biological matter, colloidal particles and insoluble organic constituents. Deposits build up on the membrane surfaces during operation until they cause loss in normalized permeate flow, loss of normalized salt rejection, or both.

Elements should be cleaned when one or more of the below mentioned parameters are applicable:

The normalized permeate flow drops 10%

The normalized salt passage increases 5 – 10%

The normalized pressure drop (feed pressure minus concentrate pressure) increases 10 – 15%

If you wait too long, cleaning may not restore the membrane element performance successfully. In addition, the time between cleanings becomes shorter as the membrane elements will foul or scale more rapidly.

Differential Pressure (ΔP) should be measured and recorded across each stage of the array of pressure vessels. If the feed channels within the element become plugged, the ΔP will increase. It should be noted that the permeate flux will drop if feedwater temperature decreases. This is normal and does not indicate membrane fouling.

A malfunction in the pretreatment, pressure control, or increase in recovery can result in reduced product water output or an increase in salt passage. If a problem is observed, these causes should be considered first. The element(s) may not require cleaning.

Cleaning Steps

There are six steps in the cleaning of elements:

1. Make up cleaning solution.

2. Low-flow pumping. Pump mixed, preheated cleaning solution to the vessel at conditions of low flowrate and low pressure to displace the process water. Use only enough pressure to compensate for the pressure drop from feed to concentrate. The pressure should be low enough that essentially no or little permeate is produced. A low pressure minimizes redeposition of dirt on the membrane. Dump the concentrate, as necessary, to prevent dilution of the cleaning solution.

3. Recycle. After the process water is displaced, cleaning solution will be present in the concentrate stream. Then recycle the concentrate and permeate to the cleaning solution tank and allow the temperature to stabilize. Measure the pH of the solution and adjust the pH if needed

4. Soak. Turn the pump off and allow the elements to soak. Sometimes a soak period of about 1 hour is sufficient. For difficult fouling an extended soak period is beneficial; soak the elements overnight for 10 – 15 hours. To maintain a high temperature during an extended soak period, use a slow recirculation rate

5. High-flow pumping. Feed the cleaning solution at the rates for 30 – 60 minutes. The high flowrate flushes out the foulants removed from the membrane surface by the cleaning. If the elements are heavily fouled, may aid cleaning. At higher flowrates, excessive pressure drop may be a problem. The maximum recommended pressure drops are 15 psi per element or 50 psi per multi-element vessel, whichever value is more limiting. Please note that the 15 psi per element or the 50 psi per multielement vessel should NOT be used as a cleaning criteria. Cleaning is recommended when the pressure drop increases 15%. Pressure drop above 50 psi in a single stage may cause significant membrane damage.

6. Flush-out. RO permeate or deionized water is recommended for flushing out the cleaning solution. Pre-filtered raw water or feedwater should be avoided as its components may react with the cleaning solution: precipitation of foulants may occur in the membrane elements. The minimum flush-out temperature is 20°C

Cleaning Tips

1. It is strongly recommended to clean the stages of the RO or NF system separately. This is to avoid having the removed foulant from stage 1 pushed into the 2nd stage resulting in minimal performance improvement from the cleaning. If the system consists of 3 stages, stage 2 and stage 3 should also be cleaned separately. For multi-stage systems, while each stage should be cleaned separately, the flushing and soaking operations may be done simultaneously in all stages. Fresh cleaning solution needs to be prepared when the cleaning solution becomes turbid and/or discolored. High-flow recirculation, however, should be carried out separately for each stage, so the flowrate is not too low in the first stage or too high in the last. This can be accomplished either by using one cleaning pump and operating one stage at a time, or by using a separate cleaning pump for each stage.

2. The fouling or scaling of elements typically consists of a combination of foulants and scalants, for instance a mixture of organic fouling, colloidal fouling and biofouling. Therefore, it is very critical that the first cleaning step is wisely chosen. SecondLife RO strongly recommends alkaline cleaning as the first cleaning step. Acid cleaning should only be applied as the first cleaning step if it is known that only calcium carbonate or iron oxide/hydroxide is present on the membrane elements. Acid cleaners typically react with silica, organics (for instance humic acids) and biofilm present on the membrane surface which may cause a further decline of the membrane performance. Sometimes, an alkaline cleaning may restore this decline that was caused by the acid cleaner, but often an extreme cleaning will be necessary. An extreme cleaning is carried out at pH and temperature conditions that are outside the membrane manufacturer's guidelines or by using cleaning chemicals that are not compatible with the membrane elements. An extreme cleaning should only be carried out as a last resort as it can result in membrane damage.

If the RO system suffers from colloidal, organic fouling or biofouling in combination with calcium carbonate, then a two-step cleaning program will be needed: alkaline cleaning followed by an acid cleaning. The acid cleaning may be performed when the alkaline cleaning has effectively removed the organic fouling, colloidal fouling and biofouling.

3. Always measure the pH during cleaning. If the pH increases more than 0.5 pH units during acid cleaning, more acid needs to be added. If the pH decreases more than 0.5 pH units during alkaline cleaning, more caustic needs to be added.

4. Long soak times. It is possible for the solution to be fully saturated and the foulants can precipitate back onto the membrane surface. In addition, the temperature will drop during this period, therefore the soaking becomes less effective. It is recommended to circulate the solution regularly in order to maintain the temperature (temperature should not drop more than 5°C) and add chemicals if the pH needs to be adjusted.

5. Turbid or strong colored cleaning solutions should be replaced. The cleaning is repeated with a fresh cleaning solution.

6. If the system has to be shut down for more than 24 hours, the elements should be stored in 1% w/w sodium metabisulfite solution. In addition to applying the correct cleaning sequence (alkaline cleaning step first), selecting the correct pH is very critical for optimal foulant removal. If foulant is not successfully removed, the membrane system performance will decline faster as it is easier for the foulant to deposit on the membrane surface area. The time between cleanings will become shorter, resulting in shorter membrane element life and higher operating and maintenance costs.

Most effective cleaning allows longer system operating time between cleanings and results in the lowest operating costs.

Cleaning Chemicals

Table 1 lists suitable cleaning chemicals. Acid cleaners and alkaline cleaners are the standard cleaning chemicals. The acid cleaners are used to remove inorganic precipitates including iron, while the alkaline cleaners are used to remove organic fouling including biological matter. Sulfuric acid should not be used for cleaning because of the risk of calcium sulfate precipitation. Reverse osmosis permeate or deionized water should be used for the preparation of cleaning solutions.

Table 1: Simple cleaning solutions

Foulant	Cleaner	0.1% (W) NaOH and 1.0% (W) Na ₄ EDTA, pH 12, 35°C max.	0.1% (W) NaOH and 0.025% (W) Na-DSS, pH 12, 35°C max.	0.2% (W) HCl, 25°C and pH 1 – 2	1.0% (W) Na ₂ S ₂ O ₈ , 25°C and pH 5	0.5% (W) H ₃ PO ₄ , 25 °C and pH 1 – 2	1.0% (W) NH ₂ SO ₃ H , 25°C and pH 3 – 4
	Inorganic Salts (for example, CaCO ₃)				Preferred	Alternative	Alternative
Sulfate Scales (CaSO ₄ , BaSO ₄)	OK						
Metal Oxides (for example, iron)					Preferred	Alternative	Alternative
Inorganic Colloids (silt)			Preferred		Preferred	Alternative	Alternative
Silica	Alternative		Preferred				
Biofilms	Alternative		Preferred				
Organic	Alternative		Preferred				

The temperatures and pH listed in Table 1 are applicable for Filmtec™ BWRO, SWRO, Low Energy RO, and NF90 membrane elements. For more information regarding the allowed temperatures and pH for cleaning, please refer to Safety Precautions (Form No. 45-D01618-en).

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