



1994 Technical Bulletins

4550 Jackson Street Denver, CO 80216
FAX (303) 355-3516 / (800) 447-8326

For More Information, Contact Steam Way International at (303) 355-3566

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ARE YOU GETTING “STEAMED” ABOUT CARPET CLEANING?

One of the most frustrating things a professional carpet cleaner often faces is when he/she investigates all of the available information, researches the available methods, collects data and does his/her own “in-the-field” testing, and comes to a conclusion about the “best” way to clean a carpet — only to have the proof you’ve collected lost in a sea of proclamations of self appointed experts and marketing hype. If you’ve been down the road of promises from people who tell you their “correct” way to clean a carpet, and you have concluded the proof lies in seeing the performance over repeated cleaning, we have some great news for you. Why is it that well over 90% of the professional cleaners, when given the opportunity to try all cleaning methods, continue to choose hot water extraction cleaning as their primary method for restorative cleaning of residential carpets? Simple — it cleans better. It removes more stuff from the carpet. It stays cleaner longer. Professional carpet cleaners have known this all along. Now it’s being confirmed by the carpet manufacturing industry.

Technical people at the carpet manufacturing level are looking past the hype. They aren’t listening to promises, even when they’re from Steam Way. They’re researching cleaning themselves. The conclusions that they are coming to aren’t startling to the professional carpet cleaning industry. But they are coming as quite a shock to companies that use marketing hype, intimidation, and negativism to accomplish their goals. Today, 9 out of the top 10 carpet mills recognize, recommend, or require hot water extraction cleaning by trained professional carpet cleaners. Sure, some also recognize or recommend other cleaning methods. The point is, the severe negative marketing hype you here from some quarters about hot water extraction cleaning simply does not pan out when put to the test by companies who make carpeting.

Du Pont Flooring Systems, the world’s largest manufacturer of carpet fibers, in its specification flyers for Du Pont Stainmaster® carpet and MasterLife® carpet requires the use of hot water extraction cleaning as part of their warranty coverage. They don’t prohibit the use of other methods, they simply recognize the value of hot water extraction cleaning.. Contained within these flyers is this statement, “To refresh carpet texture, a process commonly known as hot water extraction, performed by a trained professional, is required at least every 18 months. Proof of this service is required.”

Shaw Industries, the world’s largest manufacturer of carpet itself, has recommended hot water extraction “steam” cleaning for several years. In carpet maintenance guides for Philadelphia, Cabin Craft, Sutton, Shawmark, E & B, Salem and others, it states, “(we) recommend the hot water extraction system, which research indicates provides the best capability for cleaning.” In their new Trustmark® program, Shaw requires hot water extraction cleaning as part of their warranty coverage. Shaw also recognizes using IICRC Certified Professional Cleaners.

Why have they concluded this? Well, the best way to find out is not to listen to us. It’s to ask them. But they are part of a long list of fiber producers and carpet mills that recognize the value of properly performed hot water extraction cleaning. Perhaps, their research has concluded that there is more to carpet cleaning than making the top look good; than making it simple; than seeing how “untrained” the technicians doing the work need to be. Perhaps they are buying into the idea that cleaning is a function of creating a safer, healthier environment, as well as making the carpet look better.

Most importantly, perhaps we have finally progressed beyond mud slinging over what a particular cleaning system or method can do if it is done incorrectly. Perhaps they are recognizing that all methods can be harmful left in the hands of an untrained cleaner. But when all methods are performed properly by trained technicians, the conclusion is simple. Hot water extraction is the best way to clean a carpet.

If these comments are getting you a little “steamed” up, maybe it’s because you have not tried or seen high temperature, high technology hot water extraction done properly. Perhaps it’s because all you’ve seen are negative ads about after effects of an improperly done job. Maybe you’ve only seen carpet cleaning where price was the only consideration in who was hired and the carpet has taken days to dry. Maybe it’s because you “trust” the word of someone who has told you there is no need to compare. Whatever the reason, all we ask is that you accept a few simple facts:

1. All carpet cleaning methods when done improperly by an untrained or poorly trained cleaner can harm the carpet or the indoor environment. All carpet cleaners should be trained.
2. Professional carpet cleaners, whose livelihood depends on performance, use hot water extraction — well over 90% of the 35,000 - 40,000 in the United States today. According to a recent survey done by CLEANING MANAGEMENT magazine, over 84% of building property managers and building service contractors use hot water extraction cleaning either exclusively or as part of a total carpet care program.
3. Hot water extraction cleaning is the only system that allows for high soil removal by flushing and immediate removal.
4. Hot water extraction is the only system that employs the use of high enough temperatures to reach sanitizing levels.
5. Hot water extraction cleaning allows the cleaner to use less cleaning chemicals because water and air movement are the primary cleaning components. Higher cleaning temperatures increase the effectiveness of the cleaning agents that are used.
6. Hot water extraction, when properly performed by a trained professional, leaves less residue than any other method. Drying times range from 1 to 12 hours depending upon soiling and environmental conditions.

Now before you get too “steamed”, recognize that all carpet cleaning methods have a place. If you visit Steam Way’s technical labs, you’ll see research using all cleaning methods. If you visit one of our distributors’ showrooms, you’ll find cleaning agents for shampooing, dry foam shampooing, and bonnet cleaning. If the criteria of the job calls for an interim maintenance method, that can touch-up the topical appearance of the carpet, then another method may fit the bill.

The problem lies in the consideration of most cleaning programs places too much emphasis upon price. Too often, commercial cleaning strategies revolve around “idiot-proof” cleaning because of an unwillingness to properly train technicians. Examine the care booklet from Philadelphia Commercial Carpets where they address this problem: “The most important factor to consider when planning a maintenance program is the budget. If the budget is set unrealistically low, the appearance will never be totally acceptable and the carpet’s useful life will be significantly shortened. Although not always initially apparent, under-budgeting for carpet maintenance may make the purchase far more expensive in the long term, because maximum life of the carpet is not achieved.” What this seems to say is that if you are sacrificing the use of hot water extraction cleaning for another method because its cheaper and/or because you don’t “have to train” the cleaners doing the work, you sacrifice the usable life of the carpet itself. Not a wise decision!

Does it sound to you like the carpet manufacturing industry is intensifying its interest in truly researching carpet maintenance? Precisely! Finally, we see quality mills responding to the fact that professional care by a trained professional using hot water extraction is a must for proper carpet performance. Now the job of all of us throughout the carpet value chain, is to communicate that message to the carpet consumer. Releasing a little “steam” may help relieve your frustrations.

About The Author:

R. Doyle Bloss is the Chief Executive Officer for Steam Way International. Doyle heads up Steam Way’s research in areas of Indoor Air Quality, particularly as it relates to carpet.

Steam Way International is a manufacturer of professional carpet cleaning equipment and cleaning agents. They can be reached by calling 1-800-447-8326.