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BASIC PROCEDURES FOR UPHOLSTERY CLEANING

Although upholstery cleaning can be a complex issue due to the large number of variables in fabric content, weaves, and many other construction related characteristics, the truth is that most upholstery can be classified into just a few categories. Each set of procedures is predicated with the understanding of the importance of thorough analysis to properly identify and categorize the upholstery before pricing or cleaning can begin. Pre-inspection determines how to price it in relation to how much time is involved in cleaning. The time involvement is based on the fabric, the type and amount of soil, and the method you need to employ in order to clean it. Pre-inspection will also slow you down for a few minutes to make you think rather than just whipping out a tool and soaking that thing down.

There are a few absolutes in upholstery cleaning to keep in mind prior to "diving in" head first:

1. You should always thoroughly pre-vacuum the carpet before cleaning proceeding to clean it.
2. Always test the upholstery fabric for colorfastness with the strongest cleaning solutions you are going to use prior to cleaning it.
3. Make sure your vacuum recovery capabilities are in balance with your solution output.
4. Always pre-inspect the fabric to look for markings which may transfer from the cushions or backing onto the fabric.
5. Never place freshly cleaned cushions onto the lining of the piece. Color transfer might take place from the lining into the cushion.
6. By accelerating the drying of the fabric, you can help prevent most potential problems.

The following procedures can quickly and easily summarize cleaning procedures for the most commonly encountered upholstery fabrics.

DURABLE COLORFAST SYNTHETIC FIBERS

1. Vacuum the furniture piece thoroughly.
2. Test for colorfastness with the strongest solution (highest alkaline) you plan to use. Pre-inspect piece to identify markings which may transfer from cushions or backing onto the fabric.
3. Precondition the fabric using either an ammonia-based upholstery prespray or a pre-conditioner with a pH of less than 9. Use the pre-conditioner according to manufacturer directions. For maximum efficiency, apply the pre-conditioner with 2 gallon pressure sprayer or a hand-held 2 quart pressure sprayer. If an overspray of the preconditioning agent contacts wood surfaces, wipe it off immediately.
4. Using a horsehair furniture brush, agitate the chemical into heavily soiled areas.
5. Where needed for excessive soiling on arms, apply a stronger pre-conditioner by spraying onto area with trigger sprayer. Agitate into area with horsehair furniture brush or a bonnet mitt.
6. Allow chemicals adequate "dwell" time. Do not allow to dry.

7. Rinse the furniture piece using your portable or truck mounted carpet and upholstery cleaning machine. For best results and to leave the least amount of residue, use a compatible upholstery rinsing detergent. Pay special attention to vacuuming procedures to make sure all areas have been vacuumed.
8. For maximum safety in cleaning, apply a formulated anti-browning acid treatment. Lightly mist over all cleaned areas.
9. Accelerate the drying process by using forced air movement from a carpet dryer.

VELVETS

1. Vacuum the furniture piece thoroughly.
2. TEST for colorfastness with the strongest solution (highest alkaline) you plan to use. Pre-inspect piece to identify markings which may transfer from cushion or backing onto the fabric.
3. Precondition the fabric using an ammonia based upholstery prespray or a pre-conditioner with a neutral pH. For best results, apply with 2 gallon pressure sprayer or a hand-held 2 quart pressure sprayer. If an overspray of the preconditioning agent contacts wood surfaces, wipe it off immediately.
4. Set the nap to be preconditioned using a velvet carding brush.
5. Using a horsehair furniture brush or bonnet mitt, carefully agitate the preconditioning chemical in severely soiled areas. Agitate only in the direction of the nap lay. Allow adequate "dwell" time.
6. Rinse the suspended soil using your truck mounted or portable carpet and upholstery cleaning machine. Use a compatible rinsing detergent with a pH of less than 8.5 for low residue cleaning.
7. After you have finished rinsing each section, IMMEDIATELY brush with the nap lay using a velvet fluffing brush.
8. For maximum safety in cleaning, apply a properly formulated acid anti-browning treatment. Lightly mist over all cleaned areas.
9. Upon drying, fluff the velvet pile in an upward direction by back-brushing with the velvet fluffing brush.
10. Finally, brush the velvet in the way that it looks best, using a velvet fluffing brush.

JACQUARD FABRICS - COLORFAST

1. Carefully dry vacuum the piece thoroughly.
2. Test for colorfastness on all chemicals you will be using. It may take jacquards up to 30 minutes to bleed. Pre-inspect piece to identify markings which may transfer from cushions or backing onto the fabric.
3. Mix a neutral pH upholstery prespray designed for cotton and wool fabrics properly in a bucket. Whip chemical into a foam and apply the foam with a horsehair furniture brush. Separate furniture piece into sections. Apply chemical one section at a time. Agitate chemical with horsehair furniture brush.
4. Lightly mist the fabric with clear water. Dry vacuum the fabric with your carpet and upholstery cleaning machine. Do not rinse!
5. PH neutralize the fabric immediately by lightly misting a properly formulated acid anti-browning agent.

6. Force dry the fabric by using a carpet dryer. Place the furniture in a maximum-drying situation – sunlight, air movement, hair dryer, or dehumidification chamber.

HAITIAN COTTONS AND OTHER COTTONS

1. Dry vacuum the piece thoroughly.
2. Test for colorfastness with all cleaning solutions you plan to use. Pre-inspect piece to identify markings which may transfer from cushions or backing onto the fabric.
3. Divide the piece into sections and clean one section at a time.
4. Lightly mist the fabric with a neutral pH pre-conditioner designed for cotton and wool fabrics. Agitate the fiber, using a horsehair furniture brush or bonnet mitt, in a direction which will not cause fiber distortion.
5. Rinse with your carpet and upholstery cleaning machine using fresh, clear water or a properly formulated acid rinsing and anti-browning agent. DO NOT OVER WET!
6. Thoroughly dry vacuum out all excess moisture. Concentrate on edge and corner areas.
7. PH neutralize the fabric using a properly formulated acid anti-browning treatment. Lightly mist over piece that has been cleaned.
8. Place the furniture in a maximum drying environment – sunlight, air movement, hair dryer, or dehumidification chamber. Force dry fabric using a carpet dryer with the air movement going across the surface to be dried.

OTHER NATURAL OR DELICATE FABRICS

1. Dry vacuum the piece thoroughly.
2. Test for colorfastness with all cleaning solutions you plan to use. Pre-inspect piece to identify markings which may transfer from cushions or backing onto the fabric.
3. Prespray the furniture with a neutral upholstery preconditioning agent designed for cotton and wool fabrics. Apply with pressure sprayer.
4. Agitate chemical using horsehair furniture brush.
5. Rinse the fabric with your carpet and upholstery cleaning machine using clear water. DO NOT OVER WET!
6. PH neutralize the fabric using a properly formulated acid anti-browning treatment. Lightly mist entire piece.
7. Force dry the piece using a carpet dryer. Create maximum drying environment.

DRY CLEANING PROCEDURES

1. Dry vacuum furniture piece.
2. Test for colorfastness with your dry cleaning solution. Pre-inspect piece to identify markings which may transfer from

cushions or backing onto the fabric.

3. Create a highly ventilated environment using carpet dryers. Do not allow customers or pets in the work area. Technicians should wear rubber gloves and a respirator. Make sure your dry cleaning machine is exhausted to the outdoors.
4. Test fabric for colorfastness using your properly formulated dry cleaning solution.
5. Using your upholstery and drapery dry cleaning machine, apply dry cleaning chemical and vacuum with your upholstery cleaning tool. In the absence of a dry cleaning compatible machine, apply chemical with solvent-safe sprayer, then vacuum off with hand tool. **Never heat solvents above 100°F.** Wipe up all overspray.
6. Wipe with an undyed absorbent towel.
7. Groom with horsehair furniture brush if necessary.

These are basic procedures. They do not encompass all possible scenarios for cleaning these fabrics. In addition, they should not be construed to be the only way to clean these fibers. But these are tested procedures and should help prevent problems in upholstery cleaning the large majority of the time. Make sure before you get too involved in upholstery cleaning to attend an IICRC approved Upholstery and Drapery Cleaning Course. All of these procedures are discussed in great detail in a full-fledged course.

About the author:

R. Doyle Bloss is the Chief Executive Officer for Steam Way International and has served as the primary author for this article. For more information about these procedures, you can contact the Steam Way Technical Services Department in Denver, Colorado at 1-800-447-8326.