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1995 Technical Bulletins

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TB9440 - June 1995

DEODORIZATION AND ODOR CONTROL SERVICES

WHAT IS DEODORIZATION AND ODOR CONTROL?

When one reads the term "Deodorization" in conjunction with services in our industry, their mind inevitably seems to turn to pet urine contamination or smoke damage clean-up. The professional cleaner and the professional restorer however, need to have a clear understanding of the diversity of odor control problems that people have that they may be looking for someone to solve. The opportunities start in simple odor control and deodorization services that are needed as part of the carpet cleaning job. Pet urine, mold, mildew, and cigarette smoke odors are all problems faced each day by the professional carpet cleaner. There is no way for a professional cleaner to avoid confronting at least one of these common odor problems. Even if full scale restoration isn't your company's goal, acquiring knowledge in successful odor control techniques will be useful. The opportunities expand to full scale odor control and restoration services to such problems as smoke and fire damage, decomposing protein (Dead body cleanups, murder/suicide cleanups, etc.) tear gas, fuel oil spills, mold and mildew, drug lab cleanups, new carpet odors, skunk caused odors, and many others. Now even, a definite connecting line is being drawn between odor control and issues surrounding "indoor air quality," expanding even further the usefulness of knowledge about solving odor control problems. Most indoor air quality problems can be fixed or controlled by the application of principles and procedures that are used in deodorization and odor control.

But, before we delve too deeply into the future of deodorization, let's look at the past. It used to be that deodorization was that cherry-smelling stuff that you squirted on the carpet as you walked out the door. Deodorization simply meant trying to cover up a bad smell with a stronger smell that the building occupants liked. It wasn't long before consumers, insurance companies, and even public health officials were demanding more professional results. These professional results would come about only by much study, experimentation and application on the part of technicians and product manufacturers alike. Soon a market was developed for a service that was in high demand, because no longer did customers have to "just live with it" when it came to an odor control problem. Now that product and technology has improved to the point where in the large majority of cases we can solve the customer's odor problems, the major problem seems to be one of matching the value of the service to the price we can charge for it.

DEODORIZATION PROCEDURES

Deodorization procedures range from the simple to the complex just as the odors do. Any technician who wants to be completely ready for any odor problem that may come his way should have "hot" fogging, "wet" fogging, and ozone equipment readily available. He should be adept at knowing which chemical or combination of chemicals to use to completely eliminate an odor. Just as a mechanic needs more than one tool to fix your car, a deodorization technician should have access to all of this equipment and those chemicals to properly eliminate the odor. It may take one procedure or it may take all three.

Standard deodorization procedures include:

1. Eliminating the source of the contamination.
2. Properly cleaning the affected area where the contamination and odor went.
3. Recreating the conditions that caused the contamination; i.e., using a deodorizing spray or fog and/or ozone gas to penetrate all the areas that the odor did.
4. Sometimes sealing the surface that was subject to the contamination. (Shellacking urine contaminated hard surface floors, duct sealing, etc.)

DEODORIZATION SOLUTION SELECTION

Proper deodorization solution selection is no doubt the first requirement in handling all types of odor control problems. Here, the primary rule is to remember that true deodorization is a complex skill.. Every odor has its own type of source and degree of severity. Simply stated, no one chemical can do it all! However, due to professional education, these chemicals can be defined and organized into an easy-to-understand program for attacking specific odors. The most important requirement is getting the correct chemical and equipment in the hands of a trained professional. There is no substitute for education. Schools specifically on deodorization and odor control are now nationally available. Look for one that is based on getting results, and plan in investing some time and thought. It will pay off far more than trial and error ever could. The greatest changes in deodorization are taking place in chemical technology. Safer, environmentally friendly products are replacing harsh solvents. Products are being made that are safe for stain resistant carpets. These products will never replace the skills of a trained technician, but they surely do make his/her job easier. Completely new areas of modification deodorizers are being developed which prevent malodor from continuing to produce any odor. The cleaning technician needs to make sure the supplier he/she deals with is familiar with how and when to use this technology. The biggest challenge of the deodorizing technician lies in learning to ignore the large number of "miracle" cures that seem to always come and go. There is no one "Magic Spray". Taking advantage of educational opportunities that are widely available can help prevent this. Another important consideration in deodorizing solution selection requires at least some knowledge in the areas of chemical sensitivities. You need to know more about your customers when selecting your solutions.

THE EQUIPMENT OF DEODORIZATION

The second recognized requirement is equipment. In order to be effective at deodorizing, one rule is to recreate the conditions of the contamination. As a matter of fact, if you look at the four standard procedures for deodorization, the third step of recreating the conditions is where we implement the use of deodorization equipment. In certain instances, that means relying on hot and cold foggers or even ozone gas, in addition to spraying a solution. Sometimes we must have the ability to introduce a counteractant at the same or smaller micron size as the odor. This is of paramount importance in such things as smoke and fire, decaying protein odors, chemical odors and odors from gases. The equipment required may include the use of sprayers, vacuums, foggers, injection devices, and electronic air treatment systems. With a small investment (\$3,000 or less) in deodorizing equipment you can handle anything from small urine contamination jobs to the indoor air treatment of a high rise building. The "Arsenal" of weapons" to combat odor control is the technician's best tool.

Wet foggers are for the application of specially formulated water soluble deodorizers into the airspace. Hot foggers take a specially formulated petroleum solvent and combust it to produce a small particle smoke like fog that penetrates into most surfaces. Ozone generators convert air into concentrations of ozone gas. This ozone gas will permeate almost all surfaces and is a "non-selective" odor control agent, meaning it eliminates most odors. A wide variety of sprayers can be used for spray saturation of surfaces with deodorizing solutions.

CHOOSING A SUPPLIER FOR YOUR PRODUCTS

When choosing a supplier, the deodorization technician should make sure:

1. The supplier has a full line of fogging spraying and ozone generating equipment and can teach you how to use them safely and effectively.
2. The supplier has a full range of deodorizing chemicals to handle the wide range of problems you may face, and can provide you with supporting information on how to safely and effectively use them.

Almost every supplier has a few chemicals, including one which he/she will claim is the proverbial "miracle cure." Look for a supplier that has a complete line of solutions and won't make you any wild promises about a particular product being a miracle "cure-all."

TRAINING

These tools should not be used without the proper training. So where does the cleaner gain this knowledge? "On-the-job" training is where most cleaners begin. But, fortunately, the odor control industry has moved well beyond the "trial and error" stage. Successful odor control is accomplished by the professional cleaner combining deodorization foggers, sprayers, ozone generators and other equipment with the wide array of professional chemicals that are available. But the job is finished only by applying learned skill, principles, common sense, and a good ol' fashioned sense of stubborn determination.

The deodorizing technician can give him/herself the greatest boost by attending comprehensive deodorization schools where

intense learning and troubleshooting are designed to instill confidence. The best classes are those that offer certification testing at the end as a measurement of how much knowledge has been gained. The Institute of Inspection, Cleaning, and Restoration Certification can provide you with the names of many independent schools whose curriculum and instructors have been approved to teach certified deodorization and odor control. Many professional cleaners and restorers miss out on Certified Odor Control Schools because they think most of the information is repeated at fire damage restoration schools or carpet cleaning schools. We have always found the odor control school to be the third most important (Carpet Cleaning Technician being first, and Upholstery Cleaning second) and practical school for a cleaner to attend.

MARKETING AND AWARENESS

Probably the single biggest problem in deodorization procedures is not one of odor removal, but instead a marketing problem. Many people put up with many obnoxious odors simply because they don't know deodorization services are available from their professional cleaner. So, the first, and most important step in deodorization techniques is one of letting your customer know you can do it. The cleaner should decide what level of commitment he/she is going to make when it comes to full scale odor control technician. Being a problem solver is the key, even if the "problem" is not always immediately identifiable. Open mindedness as to what the future holds is also a key. As we learn more about "sick building" syndrome and indoor air pollution, we may need to change the way we are doing some things.

You can start by marketing services to your present customers. This may require a commitment to being willing to educate them and offer them alternatives. Then look around at who else might need your services. Insurance adjusters and agents, building property managers, apartment managers and owners, coroners, fire and police departments, and real estate brokers are just a few of the people who may need someone to solve an odor control problem for them or their customers.

The good news about all this is that what once used to be a headache, can now be a lucrative diversification to your cleaning business. Hotels, restaurants, homes, schools and many other places are open as prospects. Opportunity is knocking. Now may be the time to answer it in your business. The profit opportunities are all around you. The choice is simply to decide how large a commitment in time and money you are willing to make to achieve them. Whether the problem is Fido's "accidents" or a dead body cleanup, it is the professional cleaner who holds the key to successful deodorization.

About the author:

R. Doyle Bloss is the Chief Executive Officer for Steam Way International, Inc. in Denver, Colorado. Doyle is an approved IICRC Instructor for Odor Control. He has been involved with pioneering research into odor control and indoor air quality for over 12 years. Steam Way International manufactures a complete line of deodorization equipment and chemicals. For more information, call 1-800-447-8326,