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## 1995 Technical Bulletins

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TB9545 - November 1995

### **MARKETING YOUR PET ODOR CONTROL SERVICES**

Hardly a day goes by that somewhere in our industry a professional cleaner doesn't walk into a distributors showroom to ask one of the most common questions: "What is your best chemical for pet odor control?" When the salesperson is faced with that question, he/she has two choices. He/she can either tell them what they want to hear, pick out a particular product and point at it, or he/she can go with the truth. The truth is that it depends. Most distributors carry a multitude of products that can be used on pet odor control. Which one is the best depends upon the circumstances that the cleaner is facing, and how the cleaner priced the job. When a cleaner searches for the truth, he/she will find out that successful odor control has more to do with how the job is sold than which product is best. There are a lot of good products that work effectively on pet odors when they are applied and used correctly. But there are so many variables to pet odors, that to say that one product always works would be naive, especially when taking into consideration the three things that have to be dealt with when doing pet odor control.

You can't talk about marketing pet odor control services without starting out with the basic problem that usually exists. That basic problem is that the customer usually expects or at least hopes that just cleaning the carpet will take care of the odor control problems. Even with the customer's worst case scenario, the customer expects that the cleaner will just have to apply some magical deodorizing spray to completely eliminate the problem after cleaning. Our company has often defined quality service as that which exceeds the customer's expectations. Hence, that is one of the main problems with pet odor control services. Quite often, the customers expectations are wrong. You probably attended a seminar or read an article in a trade publication that talked about "educating the customer" when their expectations are wrong. That is obviously easier said than done. Redefining the customer's expectations is difficult, especially when they can usually find another cleaner who will tell them what they want to hear.

There are three problems that should be addressed with all pet odors. First, the contaminated area must be neutralized of the alkaline salts that the urine has become. These alkaline salts attack the acid dye structure of nylon carpets and can cause delamination. They must be neutralized with an acid and rinsed out. Secondly, the area has to be sanitized. Urine contamination serves as a breeding ground and food source for preexisting bacterial contamination in the carpeting, making the contaminated area unhealthy, especially for small children playing on the carpet. Thirdly, the most obvious problem is that the area needs to be deodorized. The cleaner must at least eliminate the bad smell. Regardless of how large or small the contaminated area is, regardless of how much urine has been deposited into the area, all three of these problems must be addressed. Eliminating the smell does not automatically mean the other problems have been solved.

Today, in our industry, there are at least five different ways to deodorize pet odors. These programs range from the simple to the complex; and in relation to that, so does their effectiveness vary. Let's try to summarize those five packages. The first and most simple program is a topical spray of your favorite solvent deodorizer from the top, and injection into the backing when the contamination is in a very confined area. This program can usually be included as part of the cleaning job but its effectiveness can be highly suspect. A second way to approach urine contamination is to use a chemical or chemicals (urine pretreatment, enzyme producing deodorant, quaternary disinfectant, solvent deodorizer, water based deodorizer, decontamination deodorizer) from the top that address all three problems in urine contamination - deodorization, sanitization, and neutralization. Since this program includes only topical treatment, its effectiveness can still vary. A third treatment program includes the use of an anionic, acid glutaraldehyde based decontamination deodorizer as a pre-spray. The chemical is sprayed from the top and injected, groomed in, and allowed to dwell for 10 minutes. The carpet is completely rinsed. Then it is cleaned again for cleaning purposes. Although this program can have varied effectiveness because it is from the top only, it does give the cleaner an easy way to price the service.

Basically he/she is cleaning the carpet twice. A fourth treatment program can include disengaging the carpet from a corner in a confined area, replacing the pad, cleaning and sealing the subfloor in the contaminated area, and then treating the front and the back of the carpet with a chemical or chemicals (urine pretreatment, enzyme producing deodorant, quaternary disinfectant, solvent deodorizer, water based deodorizer, decontamination deodorizer) to complete the job. This type of program usually has maximum effectiveness, but since it only involves contamination in a confined area, it may not be enough for widespread massive contamination. The fifth and final program involves completely disengaging a room or entire house of carpeting. The cushion is disposed of, and the subfloor is cleaned and sealed. New cushion is installed. The carpet is treated from the front and back with an enzyme producing deodorant. The enzyme is allowed to dwell overnight to a maximum of 48 hours and then rinsed out. The carpet is then reinstalled and recleaned overall. The airspace may need to be treated and deodorized. This fifth level of treatment is the one program where the cleaner can consistently guarantee to reduce the odor to a point at which it will not be a problem.

Since we know there is more than one way to treat carpet that has been contaminated with urine, and since we know every customer is different and has different budgets and needs, perhaps we need to open up our minds to the concept that it might be a good idea to give our customers more than one choice in programs to take care of their pet urine contamination problems. Think about it this way. Right now, you may be offering your favorite chemical and treatment program to your customers. It probably costs them more than regular cleaning. It may or may not be effective depending on their level of contamination. It doesn't address the possible problem of their having unrealistic expectations. It may or may not be within their budget. From their point of view, it's kind of a "my way or the highway" approach. Think about this for just a moment. There are thousands of companies across the country using a package selling concept for carpet cleaning. Package selling defines a minimum and maximum level of expectations. It gives potential customers choices, but makes all of those choices you. It gives them ways to stay within their budgets. Perhaps the same thing could be applied to urine contamination. Several years ago when we first started talking about the concept of package selling for pet odor control, we got more than a few sneers. But a few brave daring people decided to try it. They reported astounding results. People were usually willing to spend more when given choices because they could see the differences in procedures. They had less call backs on jobs. Customer satisfaction was increased.

Since that time we have developed brochures for our equipment and chemical customers that helped this presentation - kind of a good, better, best presentation. Make the presentation, make a recommendation based upon their circumstances and then let them decide. If they choose a topical-only treatment program that costs them very little, you have already defined by its very nature that it may not work. If it doesn't totally take care of the problem you have already told them it might not.

Whether you want to go with package selling or simply presenting them with more than one choice is obviously up to you. The point is; since there is more than one way to treat urine contamination (and no one way can be described as best without a complete understanding of the surrounding circumstances), why not simply build that into your sales presentation? We expound upon this concept at our Deodorization and Odor Control School. So the next time you hear someone ask me the question, "Which is your best deodorizer for pet urine," don't be surprised if I answer the question with a "depends." We want to make sure we understand your approach for procedures in treating pet odors. Then we can tell you which chemical or chemicals would best fit your needs. By simply giving your customer a choice, you are demonstrating a caring, concerned attitude toward meeting their needs while understanding their circumstances. It may sound too simple to work, but it does. The whole concept of offering choices has been demonstrated the easiest way to "educate the customer." That alone may be enough reason to give it a try.

*About the author:*

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