



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

1994 Technical Bulletins

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

TB9546 - November 1995

THE CHALLENGE OF PLANNED COMMERCIAL CARPET MAINTENANCE

The story has been played out time and time again. The success of training programs and the sheer determination of the trained, certified professional cleaners has evolved to a point where professional carpet cleaning has reached higher levels of technology and quality. One has to have only seen the "night and day effect" of a quality cleaning job to see this point proven. With the IICRC nearing completion of the development of a certification program entitled **Commercial Carpet Maintenance Technician**, it is becoming more obvious that the professional carpet cleaning industry is ready to tackle the challenge of planned commercial carpet maintenance. Your first thought may be, "I already clean commercial carpet, and do pretty good job of it." What we are talking about here though is not the normal commercial carpet cleaning that many professionals do. We are talking about designing and implementing a planned commercial carpet maintenance program for large commercial buildings, many with tens of thousands or more square feet of carpet within their facilities.

It is important to understand that three distinctly different groups of people do commercial carpet cleaning. In-house maintenance staffs are responsible for the total cleaning and maintenance of an entire facility. Carpet cleaning is just part of their job. Building Service Contractors are outside contractors who are responsible for the total maintenance program of buildings. Carpet cleaning is just part of their job. Professional carpet cleaners are independent contractors who specialize in carpet cleaning. All three of these groups must be addressed when talking total planned commercial carpet maintenance.

The comprehensive carpet maintenance program really begins with proper carpet specification. The carpet should be specified as to color, texture, construction, and installation appropriate for the type of environment it will serve. Poorly specified carpeting can make proper maintenance very difficult. The specifier should consider the type and amount of traffic, surrounding environmental conditions, and available opportunities for maintenance along with decor, style, and atmosphere when selecting carpet.

Once the carpet has been properly specified and installed, the planned maintenance program is designed and implemented on three levels. All three levels are important and ignoring or neglecting any one will possibly cause the maintenance plan to be unsuccessful. Today, there are some cleaning methods and systems that advocate that restoration/intensive maintenance is not always needed. This ignores the realities of the total definition of cleaning. Cleaning is as much of an indoor environment health control and improvement function as it is an appearance function. Based upon existing scientific research we must control and extract pollutants from the indoor environment and this can be accomplished through extraction cleaning processes. The three components of a planned comprehensive carpet maintenance program are:

SOIL CONTROL

The first level of carpet maintenance is soil control. There's an old adage that says "if you don't make a mess then you don't have to clean one up." Some examples of soil control would be sweeping or washing the entry walkways leading into a building and installing and maintaining an effective walk off area inside the entry. This walk off/entry area may utilize mats, grids or area rugs. Frequent cleaning and servicing of the entry walk off areas will go a long way toward keeping particulate soil outside where it belongs.

Another aspect of soil control involves periodic cleaning and servicing of the air handling system to insure proper circulation and filtration of the air. This goes a long way toward controlling the levels of VOC's bio-contaminants, and particulates that if left in the air are likely to settle onto the carpet.

The application of soil retardants, static control and stain resistant treatments is yet another part of the soil control level of carpet maintenance. Other soil control activities might include things like the use of saucers and trays in coffee rooms and food service areas, or introducing specially designated smoking areas, or coasters under potted plants.

INTERIM/PERIODIC MAINTENANCE

The second level of carpet care is interim maintenance. The backbone of this part of maintenance program is a well planned and conscientiously applied vacuuming schedule. All carpeted areas should be mapped out and designated for light, medium, or heavy vacuuming depending on the amount and type of traffic and soiling conditions they're exposed to. Using this map as a guide, a regular vacuuming schedule can be developed to be sure every carpeted area receives the appropriate attention.

The more specific this program is, the better. Identify which personnel are responsible for each area and which equipment they should use. It's even good to have an alternate or backup plan in the vent of absent technicians or equipment breakdown.

Heavy use areas will need daily attention while moderate or light use areas need less. It is good to have a written description of what is considered "proper" vacuuming technique to assure what is done agrees with the plan.

A second part of interim maintenance is spot and stain removal. When spots, stains or spills occur they cannot be allowed to remain until the next scheduled overall cleaning. Not only is this unsightly, but unhealthy and possibly damaging to the carpet dyes, fibers, or backing. If attended to immediately, the chances of complete removal of most spots and stains are very good. The key is to have in place a plan for becoming aware of a spot or stain as soon as possible after it occurs and having the proper equipment, agents, and trained personnel no hand to act promptly. The best way of becoming aware of a specific occurrence is for a person present when it happens to report it. For this to happen, there must be a procedure in place for reporting occurrences, occupants must know what the procedure is, and it must be reasonably easy to convenient for them to do. It needs to be clearly understood that accidents happen and they will not be chastised or punished for an occurrence. Otherwise they will not report it, even if you have a procedure in place. One example of such a procedure is the placement of a map of the area in a convenient location. (Possibly already, one is in place as a part of the evacuation plan). Divide the area into a grid system (possible right on the map) with numbers and letters similar to an atlas. Then provide a place next to the map (a pad and pencil) where the building user can write down the "coordinates" and time of the occurrence or when he or she noticed the spot.

Certain maintenance personnel are instructed to check the grids on a regular, frequent basis and respond to any notations. This type of program along with daily inspections during vacuuming should allow timely treatment of spots and stains.

The third level of interim/periodic maintenance is general appearance retention cleaning. This is a light surface cleaning of visually soiled and traffic lane areas. Appearance retention cleaning will often utilize cleaning methods such as "bonnet" (a.k.a. "spin pad") systems, "Absorbent compound" (powder) systems, "dry foam" systems, rotary shampoo extraction systems, and surface extraction systems using walk behind extractors. These methods are noted for their short drying time and their ability to greatly improve appearance. It is important to remember that these systems generally leave a residue in the carpet that if not periodically cleaned out can result in carpet rapid resoiling or even premature wear and texture damage in the carpet. The function of these methods is to maintain an acceptable level of appearance at all items instead of just waiting until the carpet looks bad and then performing corrective or restorative cleaning.

CORRECTIVE/RESTORATIVE/INTENSIVE CLEANING

The third level in a comprehensive carpet maintenance program is periodic corrective or restorative cleaning. The function of this cleaning is deep down removal of accumulated soils, residues, contaminants, and pollutants. Efficient periodic deep cleaning helps to maintain a healthier indoor environment and can significantly extend the useful life of the carpet. High Performance Hot Water Extraction ("Steam") Cleaning is widely considered to be the best corrective or restorative cleaning system. Due to the inherent hot water extraction rinse in the procedure, the hot water extraction system leaves negligible residues and cleans deep into the carpet pile removing large amounts of contaminants and pollutants. It is necessary to schedule restorative cleaning rather than wait until the carpet "looks" like it needs it. When used in conjunction with interim appearance maintenance systems the carpet may never "look" heavily soiled and may never reach a degree that is unhealthy or damaging to the fibers.

The frequency of the restorative cleaning procedures is determined by the amount and type of soiling that accumulates in the carpet. This is in turn determined by the amount and type of traffic, the efficiency of the soil control, and the effective application of interim maintenance procedures (especially vacuuming).

By approaching carpet care as a total package program, the overall frequency of restorative cleaning is reduced, the carpet never reaches an "unacceptable" appearance level, and the useful life of the carpet is expanded. The results are a greater benefit from your carpet investment.

In closing, if you are interested in learning more about planned commercial carpet maintenance, you may want to attend one of the many scheduled **Commercial Carpet Maintenance Technician Schools** scheduled at your nearby Steam Way Distributor. Pending final board approval, attendance at this course will allow you to take the examination in the newest IICRC Certification category - **Commercial Carpet Maintenance Technician**. Call your local Steam Way Distributor or consult the school listing within this issue of the cleaning scene for more information.