

Carpet Installation Issues

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Feature

By understanding the issues commonly blamed on carpet cleaners, you can be better prepared to avoid unjustified culpability for perceived damage.

CM/Spotlight: Carpet Care

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The owner of a high-end business purchased carpeting that was manufactured by a company outside of the United States.

The installers, unfamiliar with this type of carpeting, asked the manufacturer for installation instructions prior to beginning their work.

Essentially, the manufacturer indicated there were no special instructions or installation requirements.

Shortly after installation, however, the business owner complained that some "bubbles" in the carpet developed in hallways and traffic areas.

The owner called back the installer; he steamed the area, stretched the carpet and the bubbles disappeared.

About a year later, the business owner had the carpets cleaned by a company using a truckmounted hot water extractor.

Shortly after the cleaning, bubbles developed not only in the high-traffic areas of the carpet but throughout the building.

The business owner blamed the carpet cleaning company and asked them to repair the carpet at their expense.

However, the carpet cleaning company said they were not at fault, blaming instead either the carpet's installation or the manufacturer.

Who's To Blame?

Unfortunately, situations such as this are not that uncommon and they can be very difficult for carpet cleaning technicians — the last ones to have had any real contact with the carpet.

This is why technicians should be well-versed not only on how to clean carpets — recognizing different types of stains, spots and soiling and being able to remove them — but also on how carpets are installed.

Although it does not necessarily mean they would be able to detect and warn clients of potential installation problems before every carpet cleaning, at least they will have a better idea of the problems a poor installation can cause and how best to deal with them.

Bubble Trouble

Although it is relatively rare, carpet bubbles — often referred to as rippling or ripples — can be caused by hot water extraction.

As the heat and pressure of the water are injected into the carpet and then vacuumed up during the cleaning process, the extractor removes soils and contaminants from the carpet.

But, the process can also have unintended side effects such as ripples.

The heat and pressure of the extractor can make the carpet more pliable, causing it to buckle, swell and create bubbles and pockets.

Essentially, the base of the carpet is no longer aligned parallel to the floor.

In many cases, the situation is temporary and the bubbles slowly disappear.

However, as in the situation mentioned earlier, sometimes the ripples remain.

Although the ripples may be the result of hot water extraction, the problem is more often the result of improper installation.

Possibly, the carpet was not properly stretched into place when installed.

To correct the situation, the carpet may need to be re-stretched into place and secured to the track strip installed around the perimeter of the room.

However, the fact that the bubbles or ripples appear after the carpet has been cleaned unfortunately still points the finger at the carpet cleaner.

In such a situation, the carpet cleaning technician really has only two options:

- Have the carpet re-stretched and refitted in the hope of keeping the customer happy and earning repeat business
- Walk away from the situation, blaming the bubbles or ripples on the installer or manufacturer and claiming it is not the result of the carpet cleaning. In this case, the technician never expects to see this customer again.

Not So Seamless A Situation

Although carpet bubbles are a problem, another common problem that often develops or is first detected after carpet cleaning is detached seams.

Seams are the lines formed by joining the edges of two pieces of carpet.

These can be more than simply unsightly; seams can also present a safety hazard.

When installed, all carpet seams and edges must be properly trimmed to ensure a tight fit.

Seaming tapes, hand sewing or other techniques may be used to hide the seams.

If the carpet has not been properly sealed, it can delaminate, which means the secondary backing separates from the primary backing of the carpet.

Additionally, there can be edge ravel, which occurs when tufts — carpet yarn or pile — pull loose at carpet seams.

Staying Ahead Of The Game

Carpet cleaning technicians must know that not all carpet installations are the same.

So, how can technicians determine if the carpets they are about to clean are properly installed?

The first thing to do is ask the customer questions such as:

- Have you ever experienced bubbles, tears or torn seams in the carpet?
- Are any carpet edges coming loose?
- When was the last time you had the carpets cleaned?
- How were they cleaned?

The next step is to do a visual inspection.

Customers may be so accustomed to the way their carpets look and were installed that they may not even notice that seams are becoming visible or that there are "soft spots" that may actually be bubbles.

Show customers these areas and note them on your service invoice before cleaning.

This keeps you one step ahead of the situation, detecting and pointing out potential problems

before you are blamed for them.

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