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Low-Moisture Carpet Care: A System That Works

By [Dawn Shoemaker](#)

Although facilities often look for ways to reduce their cleaning budgets, cutting back on a thorough, ongoing carpet maintenance program should not be one of them. In fact, the benefits of a good carpet care program are so significant that facility managers simply cannot afford not to have such a program in place. However, often it is up to Jan/San distributors to show their customers why such a program is vital, including how a soiled, ill-kept carpet can harm an organization's overall professionalism, quality and image.

Carpeting is a major investment for any facility. According to a study by a carpet manufacturer and textile-research company Milliken & Co., as many as 60 percent of facility managers install new

carpeting, not because their current carpet is worn or torn, but because of its soiled appearance. Yet, an effective carpet maintenance program can significantly increase the lifespan of carpets, providing a much better return on the carpet investment.

In fact, cost-analysis studies by Milliken have found that keeping carpets clean can extend replacement intervals by as much as 50 percent. And the analysis shows that having no carpet maintenance program can actually cost a facility owner more over a ten-year period, because of carpet replacement costs, than if they had instituted such a program.

“Distributors should advise their clients about these long-term savings,” says Kevin Deming, western regional director of sales for U.S. Products. “Helping customers understand this prevents them from being pennywise and pound-foolish when it comes to carpet upkeep.”

In addition to the improved appearance of carpets, a carpet maintenance program can help keep carpets healthy and improve Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ). “Carpets are like sponges,” says Deming. “They can be a breeding ground for dust mites, bacteria and other contaminants that can create poor IEQ. Removing soil and contaminants from carpets through an effective maintenance program can actually improve the indoor environment and protect occupant health.”

Selecting the best

As Jan/San distributors know, there are many carpet cleaning methods available — among them hot-water extraction, foam, bonnet, shampoo and dry-chemical. These systems all have their advantages as well as drawbacks and some may work better in certain situations and with specific types of carpets than others.

The costs of using the various systems may differ as well. But remember to advise clients that picking the least expensive carpet care method may not be fiscally responsible in the long-run because some of these systems clean less effectively, which can shorten the carpet’s lifespan.

For this reason, distributors should warn their customers about the dangers of making cost the determining factor in their carpet care decisions. “Choosing a system based on cost is rarely the most effective approach,” Deming says. “For instance, cleaning with hot-water extraction may cost a bit more per cleaning, but in the long-run, this is the method that extends the life of carpeting more than the others, which means it can actually save the customer money.”

Another way to help customers select the best and most cost-effective carpet cleaning method — and more important, the method that ensures the carpet’s warranty will be protected — is to find out the cleaning method that the carpet’s manufacturer recommends.

“Here too, hot-water extraction is usually the winner,” Deming says. “They also usually advise against any process that leaves a chemical residue on carpets, which can increase carpet soiling and harm carpet

fibers. And, some manufacturers recommend avoiding equipment that leaves excessive moisture in the carpet.”

The problem with moisture

When working with facility managers, distributors should explain the problems associated with excess and/or leftover moisture. This should include how using the right equipment to avoid the problem is an important consideration in a good carpet care program, as are other aspects, such as ventilation, foot traffic, etc.

One of the big problems that excessive moisture can cause is the potential to damage the structural integrity of the carpet itself. “Moisture left in the carpet can make the carpet delaminate, which means the backing can separate from the carpet fibers,” says Deming. “And, another concern is contamination.”

Deming explains that if the carpet stays wet for a long period of time — usually more than 24 hours — mold and mildew can develop, creating a health hazard. “And, if the carpet is still moist and has foot traffic on it before it is dry, it gets dirty and wears at a much faster rate both of which can seriously shorten the carpet’s lifespan,” he says.

To avoid the problems associated with excessive remaining moisture with the hot-water extraction, Deming advises the use of newer low-moisture equipment. Low-moisture extractors use one gallon or less of water per minute during the extraction process, compared to the several gallons per minute used by some extractors.

Some models also offer improved vacuuming capabilities, such as multi-stage vacuum systems that more efficiently remove moisture from the carpet. “And some of the newest low-moisture equipment places the vacuum system just inches from the carpet, this helps improve the vacuum’s effectiveness significantly,” adds Deming.

Another helpful component of some low-moisture extractors is their ability to heat the cleaning solution. Heat improves the effectiveness of the cleaning chemicals, which usually means less chemical and cleaning solution are necessary, and helps expedite drying.

Chemical selection

Although there are no cleaning chemicals specifically designed for low-moisture carpet care, there are Greener cleaning chemicals that are not as potentially harmful to building occupants and the environment, which should be considered for the maintenance plan. Selecting these more environmentally-preferable products has been difficult in the past because no parameters or certification system was in place — but this is no longer the case.

Today the Carpet and Rug Institute (CRI), through its Seal of Approval program, evaluates and certifies

carpet cleaning solutions based on their performance, efficacy, lack of resoiling and effect on the carpet. The products also must have few or no ingredients considered likely to negatively impact Indoor Air Quality or the environment, have limited toxicity that can affect aquatic life and other organisms and be biodegradable.

The CRI Seal of Approval program is also helpful in equipment selection. Like the chemicals, extractors are evaluated on their performance and effectiveness, including how efficiently the extractor removes moisture.

Planning a program

Along with helping with equipment and chemical selection, distributors should work with facility managers to develop a daily carpet cleaning program, one that fits their specific carpet needs. “The importance of planning is often one of the most overlooked segments of the maintenance program,” says Deming. Among his other suggestions for developing a good carpet care program are:

- Identify areas within the facility that may require additional maintenance.
- Note the facilities traffic patterns and sources of soiling.
- Locate areas where a preventive maintenance program can be implemented, such as the use of more efficient matting systems at entry doorways.
- Establishing soil barriers, such as door grate systems, to trap soil.

“There are so many benefits to a carpet maintenance program that they cannot all be listed here,” says Deming. “But for distributors, one of the most important is the relationship that develops between the customer and the Jan/San distributor. The distributor becomes expert, advisor, teacher and planner, all attributes that strengthen the relationship, making it more profitable for all as well.”

Dawn Shoemaker is an editor and researcher for AlturaSolutions Communications, Chicago, IL, a communications firm for the cleaning and buildings industries. They may be reached at 773-525-3021.

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