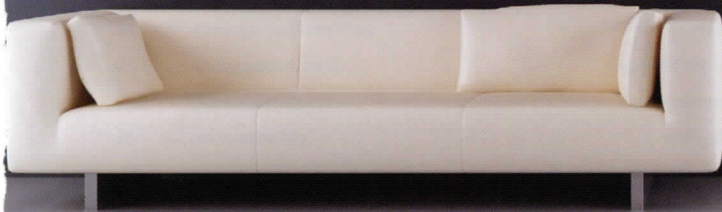


Synthetic Fabrics Spot-on in Commercial Settings



Resilience and Ease of Cleaning Sway Choice of Furnishing

By Stephen Hanig

MANY FURNITURE manufacturers opt to use ASTM codes that categorize the fabric's ability to hold colour and stand up to cleaning and spotting agents. The most common codes are:

- **W**, which indicates the dyes used in the fabric are stable and will not run, fade or become damaged when exposed to water-based spotters and cleaners;
- **S**, which means the dyes are stable to dry solvent-based spotters and cleaners;
- **W-S** for dyes that are stable to either water or dry solvent-based spotters and cleaners; and
- **X** for dyes that are not stable to either water or dry solvent-based spotters and cleaners.

Code information is particularly useful when it is time to clean the furniture because it offers direction on the most appropriate cleaning methods. Fabrics coded "W" or "W-S" tend to be durable, colourfast and easier to clean, making them a good choice for most facilities. They also contain fewer substances that off-gas, resulting in less impact on indoor air quality.

STURDINESS INDEX

The choice of natural or synthetic materials, the method of weaving and/or the addition of treatments to the yarns during the manufacturing process will all have an impact on the fabric's stamina.

Satin or pile weaves, flocked fabrics, fabrics with bulky yarns and/or natural fibres deliver a more delicate construction that may not be as durable in a commercial setting and may prove problematic when cleaning. Synthetic fibres tend to be more resilient and hold up best to different cleaning methods and agents.

The most common fibres used in office furniture include:

- **Nylon**, which is heat-resilient and usually not affected by alkalis often found in the cleaning agents used on upholstery;
- **Polyester**, a strong, durable fibre that responds well to spotting and cleaning, but has a tendency to attract oily soils and can yellow over time;
- **Acrylic**, which is extremely colourfast and holds ups well when either water or oil-based cleaning agents are applied; and
- **Olefin**, which holds up well to cleaning agents, but, like polyester, can attract oily soils and yellow over time.

MAINTENANCE & CLEANING

Regularly vacuuming or brushing the fabric will help keep its appearance and extend the period between required cleaning. A HEPA-filtered or high-filtration vacuuming system should be used to guard against dust and contaminants removed from the fabric becoming airborne and possibly inhaled.

Spots and stains should be treated as soon as they are noticed. A spot is a

foreign material that can be physically felt where it is attached to the yarns or fibres, while a stain is a colour-changing substance that cannot be felt on the fibre. In both cases, they become more difficult to remove the longer they remain on a fabric.

Fabric cleaning falls into two general categories:

- **Dry cleaning** employs a dry cleaning solvent that is sometimes applied with specifically designed machines.
- **Wet cleaning** typically requires the use of a hot-water extractor. Since heat improves cleaning effectiveness, the machine should be able to provide on-demand heat up to 93° Celsius (200° Fahrenheit). The psi, which refers to the amount of pressure that the machine produces when cleaning, should be adjustable. Settings for both heat and psi should be reduced for delicate fabrics.

Wet cleaning is easier and more effective for cleaning many fabrics. The hot-water extractor has the pressure and vacuum power to remove soils deeply embedded in the fibres. However, dry cleaning may be the only choice with some fabrics – Haitian cotton, for example, which can discolour if water is used. ■■

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