



## **Carpet Maintenance Programs**

That improves appearances and cuts costs.

Summary --- Though many cleaning managers specify carpeting as their floor surface of choice because it tends to hide maintenance deficiencies. But the absence of a good carpet maintenance program can lead to premature wear and a high cost in carpet replacement. Carpet manufacturers or distributors can often offer advice on maintenance and provide a cost analysis that shows if you're being penny-wise and pound-foolish on carpet upkeep

By Randall Weis

With companies downsizing and cutting back on services, a regular carpet maintenance program may be considered expendable. However, the benefits of carpet maintenance are so significant that facility managers cannot afford to skip this step.

Implementing a carpet maintenance program will enhance the appearance of any organization. While this may seem like a secondary priority, a dirty, ragged or worn carpet can signify a lack of professionalism, poor organization or worse.

"Sick building syndrome" (SBS) has become a buzzword for many employees who say they suffer from illnesses caused by poor ventilation and maintenance in buildings in which they work. If not properly maintained, carpet can serve as a breeding ground for dust mites, bacteria and other irritants that contribute to poor indoor air quality. In removing dirt from carpets, an effective maintenance program can actually improve air quality.

Buying new commercial carpet is a major investment for any facility. Studies done by Milliken & Co., a carpet manufacturer and textile research company, have shown that 59 percent of the decisions to replace carpet are triggered by appearance loss. An effective carpet maintenance program can increase the life span of carpeting and provide the best return on investment.

### **WHAT TO LOOK FOR**

In developing a carpet maintenance program, cleaning managers should determine what is unique about their facility, how good they want it to look, how daily maintenance is performed, and if they should consider hiring an outside carpet maintenance company.

A cleaning manager should look at blueprints or as-built drawings of their facility to mark doorways and other heavy traffic areas. Also, managers should tour the building, noting other areas that collect dirt and endure heavy traffic. These areas will require additional maintenance and care.

Make sure a preventive maintenance program includes daily vacuuming. This will cut down on the frequency of thorough cleaning and keep the carpet looking good longer.

If an outside contractor provides regular carpet maintenance, they should provide a detailed description of their program. In the long term, improper maintenance decreases the life span of carpeting and costs the facility more.

Tom Deeb, business manager of Specialty Cleaning Services for Dupont Commercial Flooring Systems, recommends evaluating an outside maintenance provider based on the following criteria:

- \* Can the company provide references?
- \* Does the company belong to a trade association that provides education and certification in carpet cleaning techniques, such as the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification ?
- \* Does the company use high-quality maintenance equipment?
- \* Does the company specialize in floor care maintenance?

Remember that all carpet care methods are not the same. While one procedure may appear to cost less, it could, in fact, cost your facility more money over time.

Some manufacturers and distributors of carpeting and carpet cleaning chemicals and equipment have developed analysis systems that can determine the "life cycle" or total cost of carpet ownership based on maintenance methods. Most life-cycle analysis show that maintenance methods which decrease the life span of carpeting but save money cannot be financially justified in the long run.

One analysis system shows that paying nothing or having no carpet maintenance program costs a facility more over a 10-year period because of carpet replacement costs. Extraction or dry cleaning can cost more annually than other methods, but they can extend the life of carpeting and provide a higher return on investment.

#### ASK THE SOURCE

One key to choosing the right method for commercial carpet maintenance is to find out what the manufacturer recommends. Choosing a manufacturer certified cleaning program can also help ensure that product warranties are not jeopardized.

Some endorse plain hot water extraction, while others recommend a dry cleaning process.

Most manufacturers do not recommend using any process which leaves a residue, because this can interfere with stain blockers or soil protectors that were added to the carpet at the time of manufacture.

For example, when one large financial company moved into new office space they needed to purchase new commercial carpeting and were concerned about protecting this investment. Based on the manufacturer's recommendations, the company implemented a dry cleaning method for its carpeting. According to the vice president of corporate services, the carpet -- which is now six years old -- still looks almost brand new.

## GET THE MOST VALUE

To determine the cost of a maintenance program over time, you must examine all of the factors associated with a particular method. Normally, facility managers select a cleaning method based on the cost of cleaning one time or for a period of one year.

Choosing a method based on price, without considering the carpet replacement factor, can be a costly mistake. After all, a method should be evaluated based on its ability to prolong the life of the carpet while enhancing its appearance.

Perhaps the most important part of choosing the right carpet maintenance program is education. With knowledge about the facility as well as about the various methods of carpet cleaning, facility managers are prepared to make the most economical decision in choosing a carpet maintenance program.

Through cost analysis, facility managers can determine the real cost of carpet care over time. Using this information, they will be able to choose the right maintenance program, prolong the life of their carpeting and reap the highest return on investment.

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