

The Wash Process

Typically when discussing linen cleaning results poor results are associated with the five factors of cleaning-Water Quality, Agitation, Time, Chemical Concentration and Heat (WATCH). Laundry management often forgets about the sixth and most important factor of cleaning-PROCEDURES!

These six factors are all heavy contributors to the results of linen cleanliness, however when discussing linen results, procedures are the most important. There are typically ten steps in the linen flow cycle. If mistakes are made during those ten steps, the overall results will suffer. Correctly training the staff is key in all these areas.

The first step in the linen flow cycle is collecting soiled linen. Many mistakes are made during this first step. Often housekeeping staff will use soiled linens as a cleaning cloth. This “abuse” may add extra stains that weren’t present during normal use of the linen piece. Staff should also be trained to not collect clean linen in a hospitality setting. By sorting linens incorrectly you have the possibility of taking lightly soiled linen and adding additional soils. All employees should also be trained to remove any contaminants such as needles, silverware and any foreign objects that may pose a hazard to laundry workers. All these errors increase production time ...and what is TIME? MONEY!!!

Transportation of the linen is second on the flow chart. Transporting with dirty carts, throwing linen in the floor, running over it with sorting carts can all lead to additional soils on the linen. Transporting is also the first part of the process where “grounding linen” occurs. When linen is placed on the ground additional soils will be transferred to an otherwise stain free piece of linen. Training your employees on the proper transporting techniques can save time, which in turn saves money!

Sorting. Well.... it’s a bad thing when your facility asks “What is Sorting?” Sorting is the first defense of stain and soil removal. Many facilities can make their staining problems worse by not pre-treating stains or by not sorting heavy soils from light soils. Some stains cannot be removed with regular chemistry in the wash wheel. Pre treating a stain allows for longer contact time for soil removal with a specific chemical designed for a specific stain. By sorting our linens based on the classifications of light, medium and heavy soil we can optimize our chemical costs. With optimized formulas rewash will be minimized saving time and MONEY!

Before we move to washing and extracting all facilities should be sure that their equipment is working properly. Two key elements in washer/extractor use are proper water levels and correct drain function. IF water levels are not correct chemistry and soil removal will not work together properly. Restricted or clogged drains are also a major concern. Improper draining can cause improper rinsing leading to rewash.

Employees need to also be trained on proper use of chemical dispensing equipment. Using the wrong wash formulas for linen may also increase your facilities rewash expenses. Explain to your employees that chemical dilutions are based on soil load and type of fabric. If they use these chemicals improperly they may damage linen or not clean soils effectively.

Another major issue is monitoring of inventory levels for chemicals. No facility should ever run out of product. When changing empty containers be sure employees are aware of what pick up tubes to place in which containers.

Washing and Extracting is probably the one step in the laundry procedure most managers associate with poor results. A huge problem in the industry stems from employees not being trained on proper washer loading procedures. It is recommended the washers be loaded at an 80-85% capacity. When the machine is under loaded, energy costs, chemical costs, linen wear and washing a smaller load than the procedures were designed for exceeds all facility costs. If the washer is over loaded, there will not be enough water or chemistry in the machine to handle soil removal. This will result in re-wash, which also increases all the costs associated with linen processing, costing your facility MONEY.

All factors such as water quality, improper water temperature; empty supply containers or incorrect use of equipment can have a major impact the results of your wash. These are all considered part of the washing and extraction procedures. Employees should be properly trained in these areas.

Drying problems are often related to chemistry in the wash wheel. Improper final line pH, residual chlorine or residual alkalinity in the linen can all lead to results problems when dried. Lint in your facility should be of major concern...especially in relation to proper drying. Failure to clean lint out of dryer's leads to increased energy costs due to lack of dryer efficiency. All these problems can be solved by training your employees.

When evaluating your facility's needs you should always have a 2:1 ratio of dryers versus washers. If you do not have optimum dryer capacity you will have wet linen sitting waiting to be dried.

Ironing or finishing is our next topic on the list of procedures. Many problems, which occur in the finishing steps of the process, are due to lack of training of employees. When equipment is improperly used, linen may tear or burn due to incorrect temperatures.

Finishing moves us into folding. When a laundry facility is dirty, one way soil additions to clean linen can occur by using dirty folding tables. Soil transfer can also occur where employees "ground" linen or drag on dirty surfaces etc. Keep your facility clean and save MONEY!

By not having enough employees or enough equipment to adequately finish the linen cycle, your fabrics will sit too long leading to excessive wrinkling. Wet linen can also mildew in humid areas after sitting too long. All these issues may result in increased re-wash; increasing the costs in the facility...costing you MONEY!

Once all the cycle is complete, the linen will go to the end user and the cycle will begin again.

AS you can see, procedures and laundry facility costs such as labor, energy and chemical use are all interdependent. If one part changes one or more of the other factors will need to change to compensate. Correct procedures can make or break the linen results in a facility. Take your time and train your employees properly and your facility will run smoothly and cost effectively.

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