

## Carpet Care 101

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A full-circle analysis leads to the best balance.

Let's face it: In the building maintenance world, many people are challenged with developing a carpet-care program that works. There are so many ideas and opinions regarding what is the best methodology and approach to carpet maintenance, as well as numerous operational obstacles that present themselves on the way to developing that program.

The reality is that there is no single or best approach for every type of scenario that exists. Instead, you must conduct your own analysis, taking into account all chain-specific variables. This approach can lead to a productive and efficient carpet maintenance program that truly protects your investment and enhances your brand image. After all, your carpet is an asset worthy of protection, not just a soil catcher.

### Start with the Basics

In our quest to develop a carpet-care program that best fits our facilities' needs, let's first review the five key components of any carpet-care program:

#### Soil Containment and Prevention

All facilities should have interior and exterior walk-off matting systems. Exterior matting should have a coarse texture to remove and hold debris. Interior matting is designed to remove small soil particles and absorb water to decrease the potential of moisture tracking onto the carpet. A good rule of thumb is to have an interior matting system that extends up to 15 feet into the facility. This optimizes the potential for the mats to remove the greatest amount of soil and moisture.

Another key component to interior soil prevention is to keep your exterior entrance and sidewalk areas clean and free of debris. All good matting programs also incorporate frequent vacuuming, as well as professional wet cleaning or mat change-out service.

#### Vacuuming

This is the single most important means of keeping carpet clean. By following a routine vacuuming schedule, you can remove up to 95 percent of loose soil. Be sure to use high-quality vacuums that ensure effective soil removal and acceptable air-quality levels. Create a multi-shift daily schedule that best meets the soil load of the facility, and develop an equipment maintenance schedule to ensure peak operational and energy efficiency.

#### Spot and Spill Procedures

Use cleaning solutions that are designed for carpet spot cleaning to avoid leaving behind residue, which increases the risk of re-soiling. Clean up spills as quickly as possible to avoid deep soiling or staining. For easier training and greater compliance, keep your spot and spill removal system simple.

#### Interim Care

This level of carpet maintenance is very important to prevent deep soiling of the carpet and avoids frequent, more costly restorative processes. Many facility managers incorporate this cleaning process to most effectively clean and improve the appearance of high-traffic areas on a periodic basis.

To achieve a surface-layer clean, you can use low-moisture methods such as encapsulation, bonnet cleaning and dry cleaning. Frequent over wetting of carpets is a challenge, so interim cleaning processes use low moisture. This enables them to be used more frequently to provide effective surface cleaning and reduce downtime due to wet carpets. Low-moisture cleaning also helps you to conserve water, reduces soil wicking and produces less wastewater. This type of cleaning requires a moderate level of labor and equipment.

#### Restorative Processes

Restorative cleaning processes include hot water extraction/steam cleaning and rotary shampooing. These processes are incorporated into an effective carpet maintenance program to clean deep into the carpet layers and remove embedded soil and residue. Effective drying methods are critical to the overall success of this type of deep cleaning to avoid soil "wick back" and

reduce the potential for odors. This type of cleaning has more significant labor and equipment requirements.

Think of your carpet in layers: The respective maintenance steps correspond with increasing costs. The best care programs are the ones that prevent deep soiling and the need for repetitive restoration methods. Deep soiling and restorative methods will impact both the general appearance and the budget allocation at higher levels.

#### Determine Your Needs

Armed with the knowledge of the key components of a carpet-care program, our next step will be to look at the restaurant's environment and surrounding factors that will affect the use and frequencies of carpetcare processes. Determine what is needed by considering the following

- Does a carpet care program exist today? What is it comprised of, what is working and what could be improved?
- What are the major soil types and load? Are there geographic considerations, such as winter zone locations or entrances near the beach with a lot of abrasive sand being tracked in?
- What are the peak times and seasons that affect soil loads? Knowing this you can determine the best times for vacuuming and spot cleaning, as well as the months in which deep cleaning or restorative services will have the greatest impact to your brand image and carpet life.
- Are there any planned remodels or flooring changes? Are any leases expiring soon or relocations pending? With this information, you can best allocate budget to focus on performing the nonrestorative, less costly processes.
- Where is the current carpet in its lifecycle? If the carpet is only a year into its lifecycle, then the ideal carpet-cleaning program will have a balance of all five components of carpet cleaning. Conversely, for a carpet near the end of its lifecycle, you may want to focus on the basic, lowcost cleaning methods.

From the above information, you can determine the locations with the greatest risk based on soil load volumes, traffic conditions, carpet lifecycle stages, store location and status. Now you can select your cleaning process and determine how often it should be completed to meet the needs of the environment.

For example, restaurants in winter zones will have greater levels of moisture and soil tracked in during the inclement weather months. For those locations, you will want to focus heavily on matting systems and higher frequencies of vacuuming and interim care in order to decrease the soil load on the carpet throughout the facility. This will greatly benefit your budget, as restorative processes will need to be used less frequently.

**Operational Impacts** Next, consider the operational and financial impact of your carpet-care program:

- Analyze the operational impact to implementing a new program. Which program components will be in-house, and what will need to be outsourced? Will additional payroll time need to be budgeted? Will an employee-training program need to be developed and implemented?
- Weigh the operational cost against the improved customer experience.
- Determine the impact and balance between operational costs to the perceived gain of sanitation levels affecting public safety.

#### Find a Partner

The final step in the process of developing a carpet-care program is to align with a quality service provider. In addition to best practices, the following are important areas to consider when choosing a quality service partner:

- **Subject matter expertise:** Determine the provider's specialty, how long they have been in business and the best practices they have incorporated into their processes based upon their experience in the field, as well as any relevant certifications and education.
- **Adaptability:** The best providers in the industry possess a true understanding of the many factors that affect the success of a cleaning program. They spend the time upfront to understand the needs of your brand and facilities. By combining their knowledge with your needs, they fully support you in customizing and fine tuning your program throughout the entire process. They are true solutions providers and seek to find ways to continually help you improve your program results.
- **Formal hiring and vetting processes:** Does the company follow a documented hiring and vetting process that incorporates the necessary checks and balances to ensure their crews are qualified? This includes employment and experience verification, reference checks, I-9 verification, background checks, drug testing, etc.

- Training and performance improvement: What is their crew training process like? What steps do they take to improve crew performance on an ongoing basis?
- Quality assurance program: A reputable service provider will have a written quality assurance plan that incorporates field management training and service oversight, as well as service ticket management through efficient technology systems. It will also incorporate service quality assessment through onsite inspections and technology based reporting. The provider will have defined and standard service objectives or KPIs in place to objectively manage their results for each client.
- Multiple client references: Service providers should not hesitate to provide you with reference information, so be sure to request it. These references can help provide you with general information regarding the above areas, as well as other quantitative information around service management such as IVR compliance or recall rates.

As you develop your carpet-care program, know that the extent to which you implement any of the respective cleaning processes will depend on the outcome of the above analysis around condition, operational impact and budgetary requirements. Balancing all of these areas will yield a program that offers the best asset protection, is scalable to a majority of your locations and will enhance your brand image and your customers' experiences. Remember, unplanned maintenance is costly maintenance.

Deborah K. Kleopfer maintains a background in program development, quality control processes and chemical cleaning systems. She has been actively involved in the facilities maintenance industry for 30 years in program development, client operations, management and quality assurance. She is currently an active RFMA member and serves on the Resource committee.