

The Clean-Up Crew

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Don't waste your repair and maintenance dollars on low-quality janitorial services

Janitorial services are a critical part of restaurant operations. A quality cleaning crew can be the difference between achieving a high health score and losing points without even knowing it. A poor cleaning crew can also be costing your restaurants more money than you think.

I began my facilities career on the retail side of the industry, where the need for janitorial services is minimal compared to cleaning requirements in a kitchen. I soon learned that proper management of the janitorial contract is just as essential to the business as the HVAC and refrigeration preventive maintenance contracts.

As we all know, the kitchen is the heart of the restaurant. Proper sanitation and cleanliness keep the restaurant operating and the guests coming back. A poor score from the health department can lead to negative publicity and an overall loss in revenue. In addition, it can also lead to needless repair and maintenance spend.

Quality Control

Quality check your janitorial company to avoid wasting repair and maintenance dollars. Consider these simple tips and tricks to save money:

Rethink mop sink hoses and sprayers.

Attaching a hose to the mop sink faucet is a common practice; the sprayer makes cleaning with mops and scrubbers much easier. It is also common for cleaning crews to use this water hose to spray the quarry tile floor in your kitchen under high pressure to reduce labor hours, instead of filling mop buckets and cleaning the floor the right way. The high water pressure not only removes dirt and debris from the tile; it also removes the grout holding the tile in place. This can cost hundreds if not thousands of extra repair and maintenance dollars per year, which could and should be spent on more imperative needs.

To remedy the situation, require staff to remove the water hose entirely from the mop sink or lock it in storage at night to limit its use. Reduce the length of the water hose attached from a gardenstyle hose to a 3- to 6-foot hose. This will keep its use contained.

Reduce standing water and excessive water usage.

Excessive water used by the cleaning crew can be just as detrimental to tile floors. Mops should be squeezed or rung out before they ever touch the floor. Dumping water to prep before mopping will slowly deteriorate the grout lines in the kitchen and other sections of the restaurant. This practice can also cause mechanical issues on some cooking equipment.

Many facility managers have received a call in the morning from a staff member who reports that their fryers won't light—even though they worked fine the night before. This almost always occurs from water splashing under the fryers while cleaners work with excessive water. The igniter will not spark when wet or damp. The fix is usually as easy as placing a floor fan in front of the fryer to dry out the igniter, but if the restaurant places a service call, it could cost hundreds of dollars. To avoid this issue, perform regular quality assurance checks, and have staff meet with service managers on a continual basis.

Protect your drains.

Floor sink backups and drain clogs can result in very expensive plumbing bills and even restaurant closures. These backups are often the consequence of the cleaning crew not sweeping to remove debris from the kitchen floor before mopping. The water must go somewhere; if gloves, ramekins, towels, silverware and other debris are not removed before mopping, these items will end up down the drain.

To protect your drains, install a drain-locking device on all floor sinks/drains in the kitchen and bar. Standard covers can be removed, allowing debris to be pushed down the drains. This can easily occur during business hours or after closing. Drain locks fit directly into the floor sink drain. Many models are adjustable, so they will fit snug in the line, preventing removal or tampering. A typical kitchen can be outfitted with drain locks for less than the price of a service call after a plumbing backup, and the devices can be installed in minutes. Locking your drains will not solve all of your restaurant plumbing headaches, but it will certainly reduce the frequency of backups.

Contracts Considerations

Whether you have used the same janitorial provider for years or you are bringing on someone new, it is very important to have a clear, defined, written scope of work included in the contract. This not only acts as a check list for restaurant management but also sets the janitorial provider up for success. Both the restaurant and onsite cleaning crew should have this information on hand.

A very specific scope of work will outline the restaurant's expectations so there are no questions if an area is missed. The scope should be customized to fit the needs of the concept, such as carpet versus concrete or hardwood versus tile. It is equally important to outline avoidances in the contract. An example would be stating not to put broom or mop handles in the door frame in order to prop open a door during cleaning. This can bend hinges and door closers, which can cause the door to scrape the floor or slam shut. If the restaurant staff is not aware of the causes of such problems, they will place a service call and waste more repair and maintenance dollars.

Standard Scope of Work

Breaking up the scope of work into building zones is another way to further increase efficiency and decrease any confusion between management and the provider. Below is an example of a partial scope of work separated by zone. Each area of the building is unique and may require different methods of cleaning. The more information provided, the better off both parties will be.

Restrooms:

- Do not wedge a broom or mop handle between a door and frame to prop open doors.
- Clean and sanitize urinals and toilets inside and out.
- Clean and polish all sinks and counters.
- Polish all chrome, brass, mirrors and fixtures.
- Empty and reline trash containers and feminine disposal receptacles.
- Restock hand towels, toilet paper and hand soap as needed.
- Sweep and mop floor using disinfectant. Remove dirt/debris from edges and corners.
- Once per week, pour water down floor drain.
- Wipe clean all stall walls and ceramic tile walls.
- Pay particular attention to cleaning cove base.
- Dust from the ceiling down as needed, including vents, ledges and stall walls.
- Wipe doors.
- Wipe and restock baby-changing table.
- Wipe stainless partitions using stainless steel polish.

Bar area:

- Do not put chairs on bar top.
- Sweep and mop the floor with disinfectant cleaners.
- Clean under all counters and equipment, removing debris from corners and edges.
- Clean all floor drains and baseboards.
- Wipe mop splashes from the top and along the front of the bar foot ledge platform.
- Wipe the brass trim of the foot ledge using brass polish

Cement floor (if applicable):

- Sweep, scrub and extract solution using a pH neutral cleaner.
- Remove debris/crumbs from corners and edges.
- Move all chairs and tables.

- Wash and dry all baseboards once per week.

Kitchen floor and expo line:

- Do not use a hose to clean the kitchen floors or expo line.
- Sweep the floor moving all equipment that is movable, removing all debris from under all counters and equipment.
- Block off doors to walk-ins/office with old linen to avoid seepage under the door.
- Do not unplug or damage electrical cords to freezers, refrigerators and coolers.
- Apply cleaning solution to the floor with a mop and scrub with a deck brush; squeegee or shop vacuum up the remaining solution and mop dry.
- Remove all trash from drains and clean drains nightly, including trough drains by ice machine and dishwasher area. Clean all baseboards once a week.
- On the last day of each month, dust from 7 feet off the floor to the ceiling, including drop-ceiling tiles, light fixtures, HVAC ducts and vents.

Remember, building a strong relationship with your janitorial provider is critical to the brand's success. This partnership can impact the overall customer experience. A clean building is just as important as friendly staff and great food. Being open and honest with expectations and performing regular QA checks will go a long way toward making sure your repair and maintenance dollars are not wasted on needless repairs caused by poor workmanship.

If any of these issues are happening in your restaurants, take a second glance at your contract, perform a surprise inspection or meet with the service manager. Increased interaction will improve the overall quality and level of service for your restaurant.

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