



## A Tough Economy Calls for Tough Spot and Stain Removal Procedures

**By Doug Berjer** — posted 08/07/2012



While the cleaning industry—and ISSA in particular—strive to reinforce the value of proper cleaning and its role in preserving building assets, tough economic times can pressure certain facilities to scale back their regular carpet cleaning programs. Some facility managers who would normally have their carpets cleaned two or three times per year are now postponing cleaning for as long as possible to reduce expenditures. No matter what technique is used, carpet cleaning typically is time consuming and labor intensive.

When carpet cleaning is postponed, the amount of spot and stain removal required usually increases. Not only are there more stains and spots to deal with, but cleaning workers report they are also dealing with a wider variety of spots and stains, many of which they have never encountered before.

The first order of business when removing spots and stains is to identify the substance being removed. This helps cleaning workers determine which steps, chemicals, and procedures will be necessary to remove the stain. However, this can prove to be more difficult than imagined.

The following questions can help cleaning workers in identifying a mysterious stain or spot on a carpet.

- What does the client say? If the stain is in or near a specific office, for instance, ask those working in that office if they know what caused it.
- Where is the stain located? Different areas are likely to have different kinds of soiling. For instance, spots and stains near a foodservice area will likely be the result of organic soils such as food, soda, coffee, etc., while soiling in a

warehouse area may be caused by inorganic soils, such as those derived from petroleum.

- Is the stain shiny? A shiny appearance often indicates that a stain is inorganic, while a dull appearance often means it is organic.
- Is the substance in the fiber or on the fiber? A substance that has been ground in to the carpet fiber is much more difficult to remove than a substance merely sitting on the outside surface of the fiber.
- Is there an odor? Blot the area with a damp towel. If there is an odor, it will often transfer to the towel, perhaps allowing the cleaning worker to identify its source.

### **Selecting Proper Chemicals**

Once the substance has been identified, selecting the chemicals necessary to remove it can begin. However, before proceeding, thoroughly vacuum the area. As much as 80 percent of the soiling in carpets is dry, and many spots can therefore be removed simply by vacuuming. If that step is insufficient, cleaning professionals will need to select the proper chemical for the job.

- If the spot or stain is organic (e.g., coffee, tea, mustard, etc.), a reducing or oxidizing agent should help remove it.
- If the spot or stain is petroleum-based (e.g., ink, oil, or grease), use a dry solvent spotter. A dry solvent has no water content.
- A reducing agent can be used to remove such things as red dyes, candy, or food from carpet fibers.
- If the spot or stain is a protein (usually the result of blood, vomit, etc.), a protein digester should be able to remove it.
- Acid-based stains such as coffee and red wine are the most common types of stains on carpets. These are best removed using an alkaline cleaner/spotter.

Because many cleaning professionals now deal with spots and stains that they have never before encountered, some terms such as "oxidizing", "reducing agents", and "dry solvents" may be foreign to them. A knowledgeable janitor distributor should be consulted to explain these terms and demonstrate how these products are used. Cleaning professionals also should be aware that using a combination of spotting and stain-removing products may be necessary.

### **The Removal Process**

Once the source of the spot or stain has been identified and the proper chemical has been selected, the final step is the actual removal process. The chemical should be diluted as instructed. Then, in almost all cases, removal involves applying the chemical to cotton towels and blotting the problem area. Work from the edges in to keep the spot from spreading. Use as little cleaner as possible; too much moisture can cause the substance to travel to the base of the carpet, allowing it to eventually wick back and reappear.



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