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# Cleaning That Counts



Determining how often carpets should be cleaned in a commercial facility has always been a bit of a mystery because there are simply no set guidelines. Some facility managers determine their carpet cleaning schedule and the type of carpet cleaning performed by the carpet manufacturer's warranty. Many warranties now specify that the carpet must be cleaned, typically by restorative cleaning (which means using a carpet extractor), on a set time schedule.

The problem is that some warranties require that carpets be cleaned every 8 months, others every 12 months, and still others every 18 months. So, while the warranty requirements should be used as a guide — and definitely must be adhered to protect the warranty — they actually do not help in determining just how frequently carpets in commercial facilities should be cleaned to protect the life of the carpet and indoor health.

A few years back, one of the carpet cleaning industry's "gurus," a man who had a carpet cleaning business for more than 23 years and now is a motivator and presenter for the industry, suggested most residential and locations have their carpets cleaned for the following six reasons. For the most part, these apply to commercial and retail facilities as well:

- A major event. This could be a special party or sales event, an important business gathering, or something similar; the retail manager wants the store/location looking as spiffy as possible.
- Visible soil. Once soiling begins in hallways, often referred to as "traffic soiling," managers might decide it's time to have the carpets cleaned. (It is interesting to note that many carpet cleaning experts now believe when there is visible soiling, the manager has waited too long to clean the carpets.)
- Maintenance. Some retail managers put carpet cleaning on a set schedule, such as every 3 or 6 months; while this can be appropriate and extend the life of the carpet, it does not take into consideration whether the carpet really needs to be cleaned or not.
- Health. Some retail managers decide to have their carpets cleaned based on a gut feeling. They want the store to "feel" clean and healthy.
- Problem solving. Sometimes a problem develops with the carpet and the manufacturer will suggest that the carpet be cleaned first to see if that rectifies the problem...and often it does.
- Odor problems. While this may be more of a problem in residences than in retail facilities, it can definitely be an issue in hotels, restaurants, schools, as well as retail locations.

Once again, no frequency has been established. If a store's carpets are cleaned on a set schedule, that doesn't take into account the times of the year when the store is busier than it is at other times. Carpets may need to be cleaned more in busy times and less when it is not so busy. And if managers wait until there is a big sales event, that could mean carpets are cleaned only a couple of times per year, which may prove totally inadequate.

### People Counting and Carpet Cleaning

About 20 years ago, Lawrence Howard stood on a corner of New York's Herald Square holding a clicker. Every time someone walked by, he would hit the clicker, thousands of times per day. His job was to get an estimate of how many people walked through the district; that information was later used to determine the retail space rents in the area.

While they may be using more computerized and high-tech systems, mall owners and retail store owners/managers do the same thing today; "people counting" is important in the retail store industry. Counting people can also be used to determine how frequently carpets are cleaned and help retail store owners set up some type of carpet cleaning program based on foot traffic.

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For instance, let's say from October through December, an average of 1,000 people walk into a store and over a carpeted area every day. That makes the monthly foot traffic approximately 30,000. However, from January 1 through March, the number of people walking into the same store drops to 250 per day. That lowers the monthly foot traffic to 7,500.



Using people counting and foot traffic information, it becomes clear that the carpets would need an intensive cleaning program the last quarter of the year and far less frequent cleaning the first quarter of the year. This is an effective way to determine when carpets should be cleaned and how often. For instance, in this scenario, it might be best to clean the carpets every month the last quarter of the year and just once, if not less, during the entire first quarter.

Unfortunately, this is not a surefire system. For instance, while the Carpet and Rug Institute (CRI), the

leading association for the carpet manufacturing industry, recommends basing carpet cleaning frequencies on foot traffic, its advice is still somewhat vague. The CRI suggests that based on foot traffic, carpets should be cleaned quarterly, every 6 months, or annually.

Other variables that can influence cleaning frequencies include the carpet's color, design, and pattern; outdoor climate conditions; how frequently the carpet is vacuumed or spotted; and more.\* Because of this, foot traffic, just as with the carpet's warranty, can be used as a guide. But to make the program more specific, retail managers should do some serious detective work.

**Experimentation**

Let's say the warranty on a store's carpet requires that the carpets be cleaned twice per year. And let's further say that foot traffic is the same as the example earlier: 30,000 per month the last quarter of year; 7,500 per month the first quarter.

With a little experimentation and flexibility, the following plan may fit the bill:

**Busy quarter/high foot traffic:** Every month the carpets would be cleaned using low-moisture cleaning methods such as bonnet, shampoo or "multiwash" machines that can be used on both hard and soft surfaces. Referred to as interim cleaning methods, these machines are effective at removing surface-level soils and help prevent those soils from digging deeper into carpet fibers. The carpet also dries quickly using these procedures, a key consideration for retailers.

In addition, the carpets would undergo restorative cleaning using carpet extractors every other month (more if soiling is excessive...remember, be flexible to the needs of the carpet and its appearance).

**Slow quarter/low foot traffic:** The carpets would be cleaned using interim methods every month with restorative cleaning every third month. This will likely meet the needs of the store and can offer a significant cost savings as well.

Variables such as the color of the carpet, its design, how often it is vacuumed, etc., can once again impact this program. While it would be great to give a definite carpet cleaning frequency that works in every store under every condition, that is simply not possible. All we really have are the guides mentioned earlier and experimentation. However, with a little time, experience and investigation, most managers can develop a system that meets their needs and keeps their carpets clean and healthy.

\* Most soiling on carpet is dry soil such as sand and other gritty materials, which can cut into carpet fibers as the carpet is walked over and shorten the life of the carpet. Dry soil is best removed by frequent vacuuming.

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