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Technical Document #45

Overview and Checklist for a Major Plant Cleaning Project

Cleanliness in a dry cleaning plant is extremely important. We all work hard to deliver for our customers, and unfortunately that sometimes means we fall behind on keeping the plant as clean as we would like. Maybe you remember when your plant first opened and how great it was to see clean walls, clean floors corner to corner, everything was in its place, and you were proud to give customers a tour of the pressing area. We've put together some helpful tips to keep you organized as you give your plant a deep cleaning.

First, Clear the Clutter

There's nothing worse than doing a deep clean and wasting time cleaning under and around stuff we don't even need in the plant in the first place.

We tend to accumulate "stuff" because as good cost-minded people we fear throwing away something that we might need to use later, especially in terms of chemicals and parts. In reality, we rarely do use these items, and we keep adding more to the pile. When times are slow, now is a great time to really think "Do I REALLY need this?" and consider discarding it (or turning it over to a waste disposal company if it's a chemical). Most dry cleaning plants have a chemical storage area and a mechanical parts and tools storage area that are in need of attention.

- ✓ Look at all the chemicals on the shelves and determine if it's something that you have used in the last 30 days. Consider the shelf life of chemicals as they are often only good for one year if unopened. Haven't touched it in a long time or forgotten how to use it? Let it go!
- ✓ Free samples that you saved? Probably don't need them.
- ✓ Strong chemicals that you used back in the day with other solvents like perc? Picrin, Pyratex, American POG, and others contain dangerous ingredients that can present an environmental risk if used improperly. Consider sending them to a waste disposal company.
- ✓ Has an older chemical changed color? It might not be usable anymore.

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- ✓ Are you saving old motors and other electrical equipment? If they are not “new in the box” or freshly rebuilt, then they are not helpful for you in a pinch. Get motors and pumps rebuilt before you need them, and tag them with the date of rebuild so you know in a year or two that it’s a good part. If you don’t intend on fixing the part, just turn it over for scrap. Most dry cleaning parts have very little value on the used market unless they are like-new.
- ✓ Tubes of caulk, glue, and adhesives? We rarely use the whole tube so we tend to keep the rest. Unfortunately it’s usually no good by the time you finally need it. Toss it and buy fresh when you need a new one.

Bottom line: Go through all your accumulated “stuff” and be honest with yourself if you really need to keep it. If you do need to keep it, clean it off and keep it organized. This is a great time to sort parts into bins and organizers so that the area is easy to keep clean – and you can find what you need later! Big box home improvement stores have many options for inexpensive shelving, bins, and garage organization ideas that work great in a dry cleaning plant.

Second, Start at the Top!

Dust and lint quickly accumulate in a dry cleaning plant. Not only does dust eventually fall from high areas onto your equipment (and freshly cleaned clothing), it also makes repair work a dirty and unpleasant job. If welding is required, dust and lint create a very good tinder that has been the cause of dry cleaning plants burning to the ground. Yes, it’s true.

Most plants have exposed beams and rafters, and this is where we start our top-to-bottom clean. A lot of dust can simply be blown off using compressed air. Some cleaners use a genius-level cleaning tool that connects to their compressed air line in the plant. What you need is a compressed air blow gun, a roll of copper tubing, and a copper compression fitting kit that will fit the straightened tubing and the end of the blow gun. Remove the rubber safety tip from the gun, and using appropriate adapters, make a long wand out of the copper tube that reaches the rafters from a standing position underneath. Use the compression fitting kit to attach the wand to the gun. You might even gently bend the end of the wand so it makes a U-turn at the top so it can blow down onto a rafter as you sweep back and forth. To reduce the air pressure, slightly pinch the end of the tube where the air is coming out. This will make a finer exit point so it’s easier to control the wand. If your ceiling is pretty high, you might need to move a ladder around the plant in order to do this task since the longer the tube is, the more difficult it could be to control.

Here are some helpful tips for cleaning the rafters:

- ✓ First make sure the boiler is off and all equipment below is cool to the touch
- ✓ Cover the presses and spotting board with painter’s drop cloths or plastic. If this is not practical, at least cover the press pads with poly plastic so that dust will not fall down and

get embedded in the pads. DO NOT PUT PLASTIC ON THE PRESS UNTIL IT IS COOL TO THE TOUCH! Melted plastic on a steam pipe is no fun to clean.

- ✓ Hit the rafters with the air gun. It's going to make a mess but this is a lot easier and more effective than getting up there and trying to vacuum it off.
- ✓ Need a longer air hose? Harbor Freight has plastic coil air hoses in different lengths at very good prices. In fact they have all sorts of compressed air fittings at better prices than the big box stores and they will work just as well.
- ✓ Stubborn dust areas and cobwebs are better cleaned with a static duster (see below)
- ✓ Make sure to blow off light fixtures and other pipes running along the ceiling too
- ✓ Now is a good time to replace burned out lights and ballasts. Consider upgrading to brighter, more efficient LED as many dry cleaners have already done.

Third, Clean The Dry Cleaning Machine, Washers, Dryers, and other Equipment

We've gone into great detail in other Technical Documents regarding daily, weekly, monthly, and annual maintenance on your dry cleaning machine. You should also have a daily or weekly cleaning routine for the exterior of the machine. When your equipment (including washers, dryers, presses, etc.) is clean, it's easier to spot leaks and make repairs. If your equipment needs more than a damp cloth, a lot of cleaners and tradespeople like to use a spray degreaser like Purple Power or Simple Green All Purpose Cleaner. Simple Green can be diluted 1 oz product to 10 oz water for general cleaning. It's also biodegradable and non-toxic. Purple Power is often found at auto parts stores and is good for more intense, greasy jobs. Both products are fine to spray on your equipment using a plastic spray bottle, agitated with a sponge or mitt, and then wiped off with a damp cloth. Avoid spraying any products on press pads.

We also like white distilled vinegar as a natural, safe cleaner. This can be mixed 1:2 or 1:1 with clean water and will leave a streak-free shine on any hard industrial surface. It will also remove scale and lime from leaking washing machine pipes or the bottom of an iron.

Be careful with agitation on shirt machines, form finishers, and the like around the air solenoid bank area, wiring connections, air line connections, and "electric eyes" or other position sensors. Use a soft touch.

When using any of the mentioned products, it's best to wear eye protection, rubber gloves, and keep a fan or doors open to circulate air.



Helpful Hint: These static dusters can be found at Home Depot, Lowes, and other big-box home improvement stores. The microfiber hairs on the duster are statically charged to hold dust. These work great for cleaning fans blades, walls, corners, and other complicated equipment like the arms of a shirt machine or form finisher where some agitation is desired, but you don't want to be too rough. When the duster is full of dust, carefully walk outside with it and shake it out. Just like new again! Only use ~~these on dry surfaces free of oil or grease~~

Fourth, Clean the Windows

- ✓ 50/50 distilled white vinegar and distilled water works extremely well to cut the haze on neglected windows all around the plant, both inside and out. You can get both of these at any grocery store.
- ✓ Get a good squeegee with a long, extendable handle and washable sponge on the end. We like to dip the squeegee into a bucket (maybe a mop bucket so you have a wide opening) and use the sponge end to clean the dust and haze off the window. Then, turn the sponge around and use the squeegee to wipe off the water. Instead of paper towels, which tend to leave lint and greasy streaks, get the blue Scotts Glass paper towels which you can sometimes find at Walmart but more likely at auto parts stores. This paper works better than any paper towel and the windows will look new when you're done.
- ✓ Remove tape from the glass with a razor blade and a quick spray of WD-40 as lubricant

Lastly, Clean the Floor

- ✓ Sweep the floor first to remove dust bunnies that fell from the ceiling, and other built-up debris
- ✓ A Shop-Vac works great to clean under shelves and behind things that will be hard to mop behind
- ✓ Fill your mop bucket with hot, soapy water and something like Mr. Clean or dedicated floor soap as per the product's directions. Change the water frequently so you don't smear a greasy residue the longer you work.
- ✓ Nothing works better than a real mop on plant floors. Avoid products for linoleum or wood such as a Swiffer. They won't work as well on cement or epoxy floors.
- ✓ Use a long handle deck brush and scrub the floor around equipment, foot pedals, and other problem areas.
- ✓ When you're done cleaning the presses, now is the right time to change press pads if required
- ✓ The spotting board is often neglected. Clean the board, especially the underside of the working surface thoroughly with degreaser. Clean all the spotting bottles and decide if you really need

each bottle on the board if it's rarely used. Maybe it just collects dust? Replace old damp spotting brushes. Clean the tip of the blow guns. If the board is near a wall, that wall is almost certainly greasy. Be proud of your workstation and make sure there's no chance that a customer's favorite shirt can get more dirty from the spotting board than it did beforehand.

What About the Front Counter / Call Office?

- ✓ Take an honest look from the parking lot at your entrance. Compare it to other businesses nearby and compare it to your aspirations and goals for how you present yourself. Most dry cleaners, if we are honest, have below-average curb appeal which results in new customers pulling up in their car, taking a quick look, and then driving away to see what the competition is like. Ask yourself if you were a new customer,

Is this what you want your first impression to be?

- ✓ Examples of overlooked exterior problem areas include decaying signage, old faded posters in the windows, burned out lights, drums, old pipes, and other litter left outside, weeds, peeling paint, old and fading parking lot striping, and forgotten landscaping. Maybe some of your staff would enjoy working outside for a change to pitch in and work on curb appeal? Does someone on your staff have a green thumb and would like to be responsible for planting and maintaining some flowers or ornamentals?
- ✓ Step through the front door, stop, and take another honest assessment.

Is this really what you want your customer's second impression to be?

- ✓ Common problems here are cracking floor tiles, dusty window moldings and baseboards, returned wire hangers disorganized, too many old posters or community flyers, old peeling paint, dirty carpets, computer wires everywhere, an unappealing view of the pressing area from the counter area, supplies stacked up in plain view, and an alterations station that needs organizing.
- ✓ Pretend you are the customer – does this dry cleaner look like the kind of place I would leave my favorite clothes for a few days?

The front counter area can be overwhelming but you don't have to fix everything right away to make a difference. Start by decluttering, re-running loose cords and wires, and removing old faded posters (hint: GreenEarth can send you new fresh posters! You just have to ask!). Vacuum and dust thoroughly. If you have hand-written signage, first ask yourself if it's really necessary, and if it is, re-make it on a computer and then laminate it so looks professional. Consider a new coat of paint on the walls and new floor mats to make a big difference for little money.

If you have a good attitude towards a day of deep plant cleaning, your staff will enjoy helping with tasks like this, first because it's different from the usual grind, and second because it can be fun as a team effort – especially when pizza is provided!

To maintain the clean looks of the plant, divide this work up into much smaller chunks that can be completed in 15 minutes per day per employee. The rafter dusting can be done once or twice a year but the equipment wipe-down, walls, windows, and other tasks have to become a daily and weekly habit before it becomes overwhelming.

A simple standard you can hold yourself to, is “would I be embarrassed to give my customers a plant tour at a moment’s notice?”.