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Find Spring Cleaning Success

Because winter's finally over, now is the perfect time to give your facility a deep and thorough cleaning. Consider these tips for making your facility spotless.

By Matt Alderton


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In all but the warmest climates, winter is an irksome season; it's cold, long and dark. It's also dirty, which makes cleaning an impossible job from November until April.

That's why, come spring, neatniks worldwide participate in the annual housekeeping ritual known as spring cleaning.

"Especially in northern states you've got ice melt, rock salt and various liquid chemicals that are used in the environment outside buildings," says Herman Brown in Omaha, Neb., contract sales and operations manager of commercial services for Goodwill Industries in Rockville, Md., which generates approximately \$165 million in revenue every year in contracted janitorial services. "A lot of that stuff is tracked in; it dries up and, in some cases, the ventilation system carries it. People walk on it after it's dry and it collects in cracks and crevices."

Indeed, winter is a messy time of year, not only in homes, but also in commercial office buildings, where the large number of tenants translates into an exponential increase in gunk and grime.

Still, no matter how dirty things get, cleanliness is always within reach. All it requires are the right systems, steps and supplies.

Pre-cleaning Pointers

Successful spring cleaning begins with careful planning. "A lot of people hate spring cleaning because they attack it wrong," Brown says. "They try to do everything in one day. It's kind of like not working out for a while and then trying to run a marathon."

Brown suggests dividing your building into zones and then thoroughly tackling each zone, one at a time, based on a predetermined cleaning schedule. "You have to step back, look at the big picture and then break it down," he says.

In order to do just that, consider requiring a building walk-through with management before custodians pick up their first rag; note the areas that need to be cleaned and then create task lists that custodians can use to match up materials with duties.

Make your walk-throughs even more effective by turning them into opportunities for education, making sure your custodial staff understands not only what needs to be cleaned, but also how it ought to be cleaned and with what materials. "Often, the key to achieving the level of cleanliness a customer expects is not in the cleaning itself," says Jim Wassell, CMO, vice president of marketing and communications for Memphis-based cleaning franchise ServiceMaster Clean, "but in the training and supervision of cleaning personnel."

The Dirt on Deep Cleaning

Most facilities do some type of surface cleaning every day, or at least every week. Spring cleaning, however, is all about deep cleaning in frequently neglected corners and crevices.

It's also about breaking bad habits and building good ones, according to Peter Sheldon, vice president of operations for Coverall Cleaning Concepts, a Boca Raton, Fla.-based commercial cleaning franchise. "For years we've thought about cleaning on the aesthetic appearance value," he says. "It's not about aesthetics anymore. It's really about cleaning for the health of the people that use and work within your facility."

Indeed, effective spring cleaning shouldn't just make your facility shine; it should rid it of allergens and pathogens, too.

In order to make your spring cleaning routine more effective and efficient, both aesthetically and hygienically, consider the following expert tips:

- **Clean from the top down.** "When you deep clean, you're going to be cleaning high areas that you don't normally get," Brown says. "You want to push dirt and dust down to the floor."
- **Focus on high-touch points.** Disinfecting high-touch points like computers, keyboards, calculators and phones is critical, according to Sheldon. Wassell, meanwhile, suggests focusing on bathrooms, dusty surfaces and carpeted floors, which tend to be facilities' dirtiest areas.
- **Choose your tools wisely.** Spring cleaning requires [commercial-grade cleaners](#), according to Sheldon, including strong disinfecting chemicals. Even your choice of [cloths](#) is important. "The rag you use to clean off the counters is just as important as the high-powered burnisher you use to clean the floor," Brown says. "It's kind of like a chain-link fence; the cleaning cycle is only as strong as its weakest link."
- **Avoid cross-contamination.** "Using a color coding system will make sure you're not using the same cloth to clean one area that you used to clean another," Sheldon says.
- **Eliminate filth.** To be truly effective, don't just move dirt; pick it up. "When you go in and clean with traditional methods, essentially you're just killing microbial organisms and moving them around," Sheldon says, who suggests using high-filtration [vacuums](#) and microfiber cloths to actually lift and remove soil from surfaces.

Consistent Cleanliness

While necessary, spring cleaning is futile without systems for year-round maintenance and upkeep.

"Spring cleaning itself is a bit of a misnomer," Sheldon says. "You should be maintaining a consistent level of cleanliness throughout the entire year."

In order to make spring cleaning stick, Wassell suggests involving building tenants. "Consider what employees and tenants are doing to promote or detract from cleanliness," he says. Programs that promote neatness, hand-washing and trash collection can make a big difference in keeping facilities clean year-round. "Foster a culture of clean in your building."

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