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Flow-Chart Your Way to Clean Restrooms

By Dean Goforth — posted 09/19/2007

Although restroom cleanliness is a touchstone for overall facility cleanliness, a recent survey of professional contract cleaning companies indicated that 51 percent of customer complaints are restroom-related. Clearly there is a need for improving the way restrooms are cleaned. How well is your cleaning crew doing?

The nose knows

If your restrooms have an unpleasant smell, you may already know the answer. Odors in the restroom may come from several sources: poor cleaning that fosters bacterial growth, inadequate ventilation, bodily fluids, gases and excrement, unflushed fixtures, and failure to service floor-drain traps.

First, inspect your restroom for sources of bacterial odor from improper cleaning.

When the building is unoccupied, turn off the lights and inspect the restrooms with an ultraviolet (UV) inspection light. Body fluids such as urine, blood, and saliva contain phosphorus and glow under a "black" light. Note the locations, or mark areas needing cleaning with a UV (invisible) ink pen. The special ink glows in UV light, and can be removed with water or cleaning solution. In follow-up inspections, you will be able to see which areas have not been cleaned.

The best places to look for urine or other bodily fluids that feed bacteria are the exterior and underside of sinks, urinals, toilets, and within urinals and toilets.

Odor can come from unexpected sources. Colorado State University was surprised to find its ceilings glowing yellow under a black light. Why? Flushing of fixtures had dispersed an aerosolized mist of bowl water and urine into the air where it deposited on the ceiling. Based on your inspection, train workers to regularly clean contaminated surfaces.

Starting with staff

Standardize the cleaning process, then teach workers well-defined steps. Create a flow chart sequencing tasks. Post the chart in the janitorial closet or behind the restroom door, then provide hands-on training to ensure workers form correct work habits. An organized cleaning cart with a specific place for each item will save time and make replenishing supplies easier.

If possible, and if traffic dictates, spot-clean restrooms frequently during the day. This includes the following steps:

- Collect trash and litter from the floor and other surfaces and place in a waste bag
- Empty waste receptacles when more than half-full; pack contents with a tool, not your hands
- Inspect and fill paper towel, soap, seat cover, toilet paper, and other dispensers when less than half-full; test for proper operation
- Spot-clean mirrors
- Inspect basins and counters, and spot-clean with a disinfectant solution
- Inspect urinals and toilets, flush as needed and spot-clean with disinfectant solution
- Wipe wet or soiled areas around sinks and on floor, using a disinfectant
- Check and report malfunctioning toilets, urinals and sinks
- Spot-clean dispenser cabinets, partitions, stalls, walls and doors. Check for and remove graffiti.

Once a day, remove all trash, refill all dispensers, detail mirrors and other surfaces, clean and disinfect the insides and outsides of sinks, urinals and toilets, and wet mop and disinfect floors.

Perhaps the greatest procedural fault in restroom cleaning is inadequate dwell time for disinfection. Disinfectants need 10 minutes dwell time to kill bacteria. Consider using adhering-foam disinfectant cleaners for vertical surfaces. Proper mopping involves two steps: applying cleaning/disinfecting solution liberally to the floor for 10 minutes of wet contact, and removing the soiled solution. Be sure to post wet floor warning signs and barricades.

Deep clean restrooms periodically (weekly or monthly). This includes:

- High dusting
- Lights, vents, and ceiling washing
- Partition washing
- Wall and door washing
- Mineral-buildup removal from fixtures
- Cleaning undersides of fixtures and dispensers
- Scrubbing floors, including edges.

Include drain trap service as part of a regular maintenance program. Fill floor traps with water periodically to prevent sewer gas backup.

Malfunctioning fixtures, including inoperable exhaust fans, also should be reported for repair.

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