Tek Newsletter
Volume 5, No. 6

Carpet Maintenance Using Space Technology

While it is very beneficial for distributors, retailers, and consumers to understand the appearance retention characteristics of the carpet they are about to sell or purchase, so too is obtaining information and reference material that will enable the consumer to select adequate vacuums and contract the services of certified carpet cleaners who use equipment that have been tested under stringent standards and have demonstrated to be capable of providing the highest level of cleaning while reducing drying time and increasing the in-use time before the next deep cleaning is required.

For many years now the majority of carpet manufacturers have agreed that hot-water extraction is the most effective deep cleaning method available to clean textile floorcoverings. Unfortunately, the use of inexpensive "do-it-yourself" extractor models, bathtub chemistries, and the poor services provided by untrained or inadequately trained splash and dash "professional" carpet cleaners (sans "certified") have tarnished the reputation of the hot-water extraction cleaning method in the minds of many consumers. It is still not unheard of to receive soiling claims as a result of inept cleaners who, in an attempt to blame-shift, planted seeds of doubt in the consumers mind about the quality and workmanship of their carpet rather than accept the onus for the poor cleaning. However, based on extensive comparison analysis of a wide-range of cleaning apparatus there is no question that hot-water extraction equipment and methodology in the hands and control of a trained operator provides the highest level of carpet cleaning available (removal of soil, water, and chemical (i.e. spent solution).

The Carpet and Rug Institute (CRI), often referred to as "The Science-Based Source of Facts on Carpet and Rugs" (i.e. the brain center) has been vigorously involved with leading carpet manufacturers, other academia and textile testing labs in effort to test and gather data pertaining to the efficacy of vacuum cleaners, hot-water extraction cleaning equipment and cleaning chemicals that have been submitted by conscientious manufacturers of these products who have been willing to date to participate in these studies. With additional cooperation and exchange of knowledge with NASA and the Space Foundation, the CRI, using this technology, has developed a testing protocols for this need that have now been recognized by these agencies as "Certified Space Technology".

According to this SOA program carpet cleaning chemicals (which will be graded against water as the control standard, will be rated based on their ability to

remove soil, their re-soiling propensity, alkalinity, and fiber colorfastness influence. Chemicals containing optical brightener will not be considered here.

- Vacuum Cleaners will be scored based on their ability to remove soil, dust containment-or the emission levels of vacuumed soils from the bag/filter/machine, and the appearance retention they provide to the pile yarns.

- Spot cleaning agents will be assessed based on their ability to remove the more stubborn household staining agents and will include dirty motor oil, indelible ink and the AATCC synthetic soil mentioned in Part One of this newsletter and will be rated for cleaning efficacy using the ASTM D 6540 test method outlined in this same section.

- In-tank type cleaning chemicals will be evaluated on their ability to remove soil and restore the appearance of a carpet, and their re-soiling propensity will be determined by comparing the difference between the soiled, cleaned and restored carpet specimen to a section or same specimen that is later re-soiled (using synthetic soil).

- Extractor ratings will be based on ratings for both deep extraction cleaning (professional using professional-grade portable and truck mount extractors) and "interim cleaning" (home use for spot cleaning). Extractors will be rated on a basis similar to the vacuum criteria.

In September of this year the CRI plans to officially launch their CRI Seal of Approval (SOA) and CRI XRF (x-ray fluorescence technology) Seal of Approval Certification Programs. These programs are intended to raise the bar in the cleaning community by quantifying the overall ability of cleaning equipment and chemicals manufactured in this trade for carpet cleaning and maintenance so that our products will be more likely to receive the quality of care they deserve.

The carpet industry is in a state of constant evolution, striving for and setting new standards of excellence in fiber technology, innovative carpet constructions, dye methods and stain/soil resistant chemistries in an on-going effort to provide extraordinary products to the textile floorcovering market. Distributors and retailers see the advantages new carpet manufacturing technology offers them and are quick to inform consumers of these advantages and sell these carpets. Of similar importance is the need to recognize and identify with the most effective cleaning equipment and provide this information to their customers as part of their service at the point sale.

Floorcovering is a major investment. Consumers who invest in today's superior carpets want and deserve nothing less than superior carpet care and

maintenance as well. Those cleaning equipment and chemical manufacturers who take part in this latest CRI SOA program and meet the criteria established therein have the opportunity to distinguish themselves from the others in their trade and reaping the rewards by guaranteeing to the consumer that when used correctly, the products they make are capable of providing the level of carpet care they seek.