



# Housekeeping

by Elizabeth Kozlowski

## Keeping a fresh look: Maintaining a hotel's investment in its carpets

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One of a hotel's most important, yet overlooked, assets are the carpets running throughout it: in the guestrooms, hallways, lobby, and even the back of the house. A crisp, clean carpet creates a very positive and lasting impression among guests, patrons and another of the hotel's most important assets, the employees.

The first impression of guests and patrons is crucial, especially for first-timers. For guests, seeing a fresh carpet in the guestroom is the most visible sign of cleanliness and gives them a good feeling about the rest of the room. It is also important to impress local patrons utilizing an outlet such as a restaurant or spa because they can create positive buzz in the local community. But, a hotel must not neglect the back of the house areas either because employees who work in a clean, comfortable environment are more productive; thus, *happy employees make happy guests*.

Pictured below: The bonnet machine (left) is ideal for quickly cleaning a stained carpet that must dry quickly. An extraction machine (right) is better suited to clean not only the carpet surface, but to extract any dirt and residue lying beneath the surface down to the padding.



### Carpet maintenance

Before discussing the steps to maintaining clean carpets, it is necessary here to review three common kinds of carpet found in hotels: wool, wool blend with polyester and cotton, and silk. Silk is the most delicate of these three and wool is a close second. The wool blend can withstand the most use and abuse, but still needs to be treated delicately.

Carpet maintenance must occur both on a daily basis and also on a deep cleaning schedule. A houseperson who is dedicated to shampooing carpets is a vital part of a hotel's housekeeping team, if budget allows for it. This person is responsible for the daily maintenance of the carpets, which involves removing only the visible spots. This includes such things as footprints in the hallway to coffee or soda spills in the guestrooms.

A very effective chemical for removing individual spots is a chemical called Stain Magic. The chemical is a mix of peroxide and ammonia. The peroxide bubbles up and shows that it is killing any bacteria that might have formed. The job of the ammonia is to bring the stain up to the surface. The mix of peroxide (an acid) and ammonia (a base) creates a neutral chemical reaction that does not harm the carpet. After spraying the chemical on the spot, it should sit for ten seconds as the peroxide bubbles up and then be scrubbed rigorously with a hard bristle hand brush.

For tougher stains, such as nail polish, there is a chemical called Red Relief that is used in conjunction with a handheld steam machine. In addition to ammonia and peroxide, Red Relief also contains a chemical called Magnum which has more of a soapy consistency to help wash out the stain. After spraying the Red Relief on the spot, a dry cloth is placed over it and then the steamer on top of that. The steam filters through the cloth and brings up the stain. The purpose of the cloth is to absorb the stain as it melts. The spot should be dabbed and not scrubbed, as this will cause the stain to spread.

### **Bonneting vs. extraction**

For areas where the entire carpet needs to be cleaned, there are two different machines that can be used. Extra care must be taken in using these machines as it involves cleaning the entire carpet as opposed to just a small area.

When a carpet has many little spots all over, it becomes too time consuming to try to spot shampoo it. Yet, in many instances, it is necessary for the carpet to dry quickly, such as when a guestroom has a quick turnaround. A bonnet machine is ideal for this situation.

A bonnet machine is a large circular brush that is pushed manually by a large handle. The brush spins at 175 rpm. This machine skims the surface of the carpet, performing a quick fix of any visible spots. The carpet is first misted with a mix of water and the Magnum chemical. Then the machine is run over the surface area of the carpet. There are two cleaning methods used with this machine: dry and wet.

The only difference between these two methods is that with the wet method the brush of the machine is dampened with the chemical, while in the dry method it is not. The dry method is used for the wool carpet. The wet method is used for the wool blend carpet as it causes the carpet to get wetter. The carpet dries very quickly with each method; the wet method takes ten minutes while the dry only takes five. It is recommended, however, that since the bonnet machine only refreshes the surface of the carpet that the specific carpet is revisited as soon as possible for a deep clean.

It is a good practice to develop a general cleaning program for the hotel where all of the rooms go through a deep cleaning at least twice a year. To avoid taking needed guestrooms out of service, guestrooms are typically deep-cleaned whenever the hotel experiences its lowest occupancy. An important component of any deep-cleaning program is the extraction of the carpets. An extraction machine cleans not only the surface, but brings up all of the dirt and residue lying beneath the surface down to the padding.

An extraction machine is a large metal tank about three and a half feet high used in conjunction with a 50-gallon plastic garbage bin on wheels. There is one hose projecting out of the front of the machine that is used to both squirt out the chemical and then suck out the dirt. Another hose comes out of the back and is placed inside the garbage can, which is filled with warm water mixed with the chemical. To put it all together now, the back hose pumps the chemical mixture through the tank to the front hose and into contact with the carpet. The machine is very loud so it is preferable to have the entire floor placed out of order or, for larger floors, a large portion of it out of order. Extraction is a vital part of maintaining a hotel's carpets.

After the process is finished, the water is black from all the dirt that was brought out that was invisible on the surface. This is especially key for dark colored carpets as many spills and stains are never visible. Some would say that a dark colored carpet is a blessing since the stains are hidden, but it can actually be more of a curse since it is more difficult to tell just how much dirt and bacteria have accrued. Ignorance is not bliss when it comes to keeping carpets clean.

There are two types of extraction: instant and constant. The instant method is used with the more delicate 100% wool carpet. This method does not get the carpet as wet. If the wool carpet gets too wet, it will shrink and pull away from the seams. With the instant method, the chemical is pumped out intermittently so the carpet does not get as wet. This method works best with a chemical called Perfusion, which is a blend of peroxide and alcohol. When dissolved in water it has a soapy consistency and leaves a light pleasant smell in the room. The addition of the alcohol helps the carpet dry quicker as alcohol absorbs water. The carpet dries in only two to three hours using this method.

The constant method is used with the more resilient wool blend carpet. With this method the chemical pumps out constantly as the carpet is being extracted, so it gets quite wet. However, the chemical best suited for this method, called Quick Dry, contains a small amount of sodium in addition to peroxide and alcohol to absorb a lot of that water and aid in the drying process. The carpet takes about six to eight hours to dry.

The exclusion of any discussion about silk carpet thus far has been intentional. Silk carpet is so delicate that it is highly recommended to entrust it to the expertise of a reputable outside company. Any attempt to spot shampoo or deep clean the carpet will likely leave permanent damage.

### **The proof is in the numbers**

So, is spending thousands of dollars on chemicals and equipment really worth it? A good quality wool blend carpet will cost about \$11.50 per square yard and a good quality wool carpet will be about \$15 per square yard. It is reasonable to say that an average size room contains about 52 square yards of carpet.

Based on these figures, to replace all of the guestroom carpets in a 370-room hotel, a wool blend carpet would cost the hotel about \$221,260 and wool would cost about \$288,600 (excluding labor and other variable expenses). For simplicity, this estimate does not even take into account the cost of replacing the hallway carpets and will assume that there are no suites in the hotel. A carpet which is not

maintained well will not last much longer than five years before it will appear too shabby, whereas well-maintained carpets can last anywhere between ten to fifteen years.

The cost of maintaining the carpet so it doesn't have to be replaced until ten years from now would be about \$34,062.60. Again, for simplicity, this example will assume that all of the rooms have 100% wool carpet. An extraction machine costs about \$3,500. The Perfusion chemical that is used with the wool carpet costs approximately \$89.89 for a case. So, to reach the given number multiply \$89.89 by 17 cases (needed to cover 370 rooms) multiplied by two (extraction twice a year) multiplied by ten years (time it takes to need a new carpet). Extraction is included for this example as the bare minimum that must be done to maintain the carpets.

Therefore, by not maintaining the carpets, a hotel would spend at least \$577,200 in ten years to replace the carpets twice. The difference comes to \$543,137.40. This difference leaves plenty of extra money to buy the other chemicals and equipment that can help maintain the carpets on a daily basis. A bonnet machine costs about \$800 and all of the other chemicals range from \$45 (Magnum and Quick Dry) to \$165 (Stain Magic) per case. The numbers show it is more than a worthy investment.

The last bit that should be factored in is something one cannot quantify: the satisfaction of employees and guests who feel good about the place in which they work and temporarily call home, respectively. ✧

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