

Professional Clothing Care Services

A.W. Koester

This publication is one of a set written to help consumers select and care for today's clothing. Three of the publications—fibers and fabrics; information found on garment labels; and dyeing and colorfastness—aid consumers in evaluating clothing and household textiles. Those on laundry aids and laundry detergents and soaps help consumers choose effective cleaning products. The publication on professional clothing care services discusses working with a dry cleaner.

Dry cleaning is recommended over laundering for many garments and home furnishings. Dry cleaning more effectively removes grease and oil. Fibers that may swell and become shorter or shrink in laundering may not shrink in dry cleaning, and some colors that are damaged by laundering may be dry cleaned safely. Coats and jackets with multiple layers and fabrics are more safely dry cleaned.

Dry cleaning uses a liquid solvent instead of water to do the cleaning. Even though the solvent contains a small amount of water, it is called "dry" in spite of being a liquid. Dry cleaning solvent is expensive so it is filtered, distilled, and reused. Some dry cleaning establishments have several types of solvents available for cleaning different garments.

Dry cleaning solvents have varying degrees of toxicity and some are flammable. To protect employees, dry cleaning establishments monitor the air. Well-run dry cleaning establishments will not have a strong chemical odor.

Dry cleaning equipment for the home is not practical nor is it available. Most people prefer to use a professional dry cleaning establishment for expensive, bulky, difficult-to-press, or "dry clean only" items.

An important step in the dry cleaning process is the removal of spots and stains. Each business has specialized equipment, such as a vacuum board (shaped like an ironing board) to draw the chemicals through the fabric before damaging it. Many stains that are difficult to remove with home methods can be removed by the dry cleaner if they have not been set and if the fabric has not been damaged by home removal methods.

Dry cleaning procedures

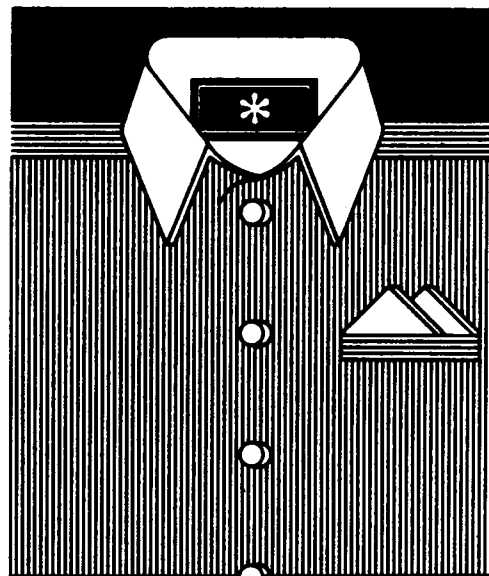
Most professional dry cleaners follow certain basic procedures. These include:

1. Receiving garments from the customer and noting any spots or stains to be removed, any special services requested.

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* TODAY'S CLOTHING CARE

2. Identifying and tagging all items in an order with an identical number so they can be grouped and returned to the customer.
3. Reading care labels for care instructions and fiber content to determine the fibers present. The garments are also evaluated for fabric construction and possible dyes in the fabric.
4. Removing spots and stains with special chemicals and removing any water-based stains.
5. Sorting items by fiber, construction, color, and degree of soil.
6. Placing similar items in a dry cleaning machine for tumbling in filtered solvent with detergents. The machine resembles a large tumble-type washing machine, but contains a solvent plus a certain humidity level. Tumbling time varies from 2 to 12 minutes depending on the items being cleaned.

Ardis W. Koester, Extension textiles and clothing specialist, Oregon State University.

7. Replacing the solvent and detergent solution with a clear solvent for rinsing, then extracting or removing the solvent with a spin cycle. The items may be dried in the same machine, depending on the solvent and machine system.
8. Removing any remaining solvent in a reclaimer tumbler or cabinet, where a current of warm, fresh air circulates through the fabrics. As the solvent evaporates, final traces of solvent odor are removed.
9. Inspecting each item by a skilled spotter, and removing any remaining spots and stains.
10. Pressing and finishing all items. Professional finishing uses heat, steam, moisture, pressure, and vacuum drying with specialized equipment. This specialized equipment avoids scorching, heat damage, and press marks.
11. Replacing missing buttons and performing minor repairs.
12. Assembling all parts of a customer's order for a final inspection and packaging them for the customer.

Special services

Many dry cleaners offer special services such as bulk cleaning, custom cleaning, and laundry service. Bulk cleaning, also known as economy or "clean only" service, will reduce costs because items are cleaned but not pressed or finished. Prices for economy cleaning are usually determined by the pound. For consumers who are able to do their own pressing, this service provides an economical alternative.

Custom dry cleaning is more expensive, because it includes individual services such as brushing lint from pockets, measuring and blocking knits, hand-pressing linings, pressing seam allowances open, and padding sleeves with tissue paper before bagging.

Some dry cleaners offer spot and stain removal services. Since they have the chemicals and equipment available, the cleaners would rather remove spots and

stains before the consumer sets them with home methods. These services are economical and may be used before home-laundering a garment.

Other specialty services may include handling specialized items and adding special finishes such as draperies; pillows, sleeping bags, and down garments; leathers and suedes; furs; garment storage; smoke and fire restoration; garment repairs and alterations; wedding gown cleaning and storage; waterproofing; moth proofing; and soil-resistant finishing.

Consult the advertising section of your telephone book or ask about special services at the dry cleaning establishment. Expect to pay for these services.

Selecting a dry cleaner

Selecting a dry cleaner may be difficult. In some places there may be little choice among dry cleaners; where you do have a choice, the trial-and-error method can be frustrating and expensive. You can make your decision on convenience, location, or services available, or by a recommendation from someone whose opinion you trust. Asking a friend you consider well groomed is usually a reliable method for locating a dry cleaner who does quality work.

Membership in the national dry cleaning trade association, International Fabricare Institute (IFI), may be considered a recommendation. Check for the IFI emblem at the dry cleaners; it is usually displayed near the door or counter. Dry cleaners who are members receive research and technical reports to keep up to date with the latest technology. Dry cleaners also may be members of a state organization.

Observe the atmosphere and appearance of a dry cleaning establishment. The person at the counter should be attentive, noting spots and stains identified by the customer and pointing out risks in cleaning certain items. Is the check-in counter and surrounding area neat, clean, and well organized?

If you are using a dry cleaning establishment for the first time, you may want to look over the items before you take them home.

Customer responsibility

As a customer, you have a responsibility with "dry clean only" items. Be sure to clean apparel and household items often before stains, spots, or soil are difficult or impossible to remove.

Tell the dry cleaner about potential stains, especially invisible spills from soft drinks and alcoholic beverages containing sugar. The area around the stain needs to be flushed with water and dried before the dry cleaning process. These stains become permanent when heated during the drying stages of dry cleaning.

Avoid letting your clothes come in contact with perfumes, hairsprays, lotions, and beverages. The alcohol in these products may cause dye changes.

Let antiperspirants and deodorants dry before dressing because they may stain or deteriorate fabric.

Protect garments from excessive perspiration. The chloride salts in perspiration can seriously weaken and cause holes in delicate fabrics like silk.

Protect garments from prolonged exposure to direct sunlight or strong indirect light. Bright colors, especially blues and greens, tend to change color or fade.

Don't press stained or soiled clothes. The heat will set stains and force heavy soil deeper into the fibers.

Commercial laundering

Commercial laundering differs from home laundering in some of the procedures and chemicals used. Many of the steps are similar. Commercial laundering also begins with sorting by color, fiber content, and amount of soil.

Commercial laundries use softened water; soaps or detergents formulated to work at different temperatures; alkali; bleach; and an acid sour, depending on the items being washed. The commercial laundry procedure uses several washing steps, called "breaks": two to three sudsings, three to four rinses, a sour, and an additional rinse. After washing, the load may be moved to a separate machine for extraction or spinning dry.

Items that are commercially laundered are tumble dried to the desired degree of dryness, then finished or pressed.

Commercially laundered shirts are finished on special presses that do large sections of the garment at one time.

Usually men's shirts cost less to launder than women's shirts. This is because men's shirts fit on a standard shirt press. Women's shirts may not fit on the shirt press unit because they have narrower shoulders, wrists, and collars. However, some laundries are now purchasing pressing equipment with variable sizes. Currently, women's shirts usually are hand ironed, especially if they have darts, pleats, and gathers or style variations that make them less likely to fit the standard shirt press. Each laundry may set their own prices, depending on the equipment they have.

For more information

- Faig, K. (1981). *Principles of detergency for laundry operation*. IFI Special Reporter. (5)1, p. 1-7.
- Lester, E. (1986). *Glossary of laundry terms*. IFI Special Reporter, (14)3, p. 1-11.
- Straight Talk About Drycleaning*. (No Date) International Fabricare Institute, 12251 Tech Road, Silver Spring, MD 20904.
- Young, E. (1982). *Dry Cleaning*, Fact Sheet 318, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

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- EC 1279, *Garment Labels: The Consumer's Information Source*. \$1.00
- EC 1280, *Dyeing and Colorfastness in Fabrics*. \$1.00
- EC 1281, *Fibers and Fabrics Update*. 75¢
- EC 1283, *Laundry Detergents and Soaps*. \$1.00
- EC 1284, *Selecting and Using Laundry Aids*. 75¢
- PNW 197, *Quality Standards in Clothing Construction*. 25¢



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