by Richard J. Bennett

What every manager needs to know to alleviate hotel laundry woes

Competitive pressures demand that hotels deliver more to their guests. That's not always as easy as it sounds. Your property may have used 8-pound towels a number of years ago, but guests now are expecting a thicker 10-pound towel. Perhaps your clientele has already led you to a more luxurious 14-pound bath towel ensemble. In any case, your hotel's laundry probably wasn't designed for the extra poundage. The fact is many hotel on-premise laundries really weren't that well thought out to begin with. The first step to cleaning up with energy savings is to start with a thorough examination of the laundry's dryers.

Dryers and airflow

Dryers are usually the culprits in slow laundry production. Airflow dries the linen and terry to a much greater degree than does the heat in the dryers. One easy clue to a problem is the glass door on the dryer. If it is hot to the touch, airflow problems exist.

A plentiful supply of oxygen is necessary for good combustion. A blue flame in the dryer's burner indicates this. If a yellow flame is visible, it may be necessary to increase the "make-up" air for the dryer. This can be accomplished by adding louvers to the door into the hotel's laundry room or by adding or enlarging the vented hole in the wall that brings in fresh air. Segregate unconditioned air by enclosing the dryers with a soffit and access door. The laundry staff will enjoy conditioned air and the hotel will benefit from more efficient dryers.

Ductwork

Whether it's old or new, the laundry's ductwork should be examined. Take a look behind the dryers. If there are one or more 90-degree elbows on the ducts, static pressure is increasing in the duct. That increase slows the air movement and extends the dry time. If there is room for a "sweep" instead of a 90-degree elbow, have an HVAC technician make the change.

When replacing the dryers, there are new "high airflow" dryers that will likely require an increase in the hotel's duct size, but these new machines can significantly reduce the needed dry time. The dollars the hotel spends reworking the laundry's ductwork will pay for itself over and over again in reduced gas and electric expense, lower labor costs and fewer headaches. Just think of how much shaving ten minutes off of every load in the dryers could save the housekeeping department over the course of a year.

Laundering linens and terry

Proper laundering procedures have a greater influence on the useful life of the property's towels and sheets than any other single factor. All of the towels and sheets in common use today are composed of cotton, polyester, or blends of these two fibers. Towels are predominantly cotton, so they are more susceptible to chemical damage, whereas sheets are usually 50/50 blends of cotton and polyester. An improper laundering that occurs just one time may cause damage that might only become evident after several washings. Damaged linens are a major expense that can wreak havoc on any housekeeping budget.

The current need for energy conservation and economy of time in processing has led to shorter rinse cycles, less hot water being used, and larger wash loads. All of these practices increase the chance that chemical residues may be left in the fabric and concentrate upon drying. Don't wait until sheets and towels are all washed up, increase their longevity by instituting recommended laundry practices. The following are few tips to keep in mind for correct laundering:

Towels

- Newly purchased towels should be laundered at least one time before use to extract any chemicals remaining in the towel from manufacturing.
- The first rinse after washing should be a "hot" rinse to adequately remove suspended soil and laundry chemicals.

- Two rinse cycles are recommended, the second can be warm or cold as long as the equipment is not overloaded.
- Heavily soiled towels should be separated from the bulk of the wash load to allow for “pre-soaking.”

- It is wiser to discard a very heavily soiled towel than to run the risk of it cross-staining and ruining an entire load of laundry.
- Towels should be given a “hot wash” (140 - 160 degrees F) if non-chlorine bleach is used. Warm water (less than 120 degrees F) may be used for chlorine bleach.
- Most cosmetic stains can be removed from towels with a good pre-soak followed by a hot wash.
- Fading of color towels is usually the result of improper or excessive use of bleach during laundering.
- Fabric softeners should not be used on towels. It not only reduces absorbency, but also can build up in the fabric after several washings and attract soil.

Sheets

- High temperatures should be avoided in the laundering of cotton/polyester blends.
- Excessive temperatures during drying and ironing can “set” wrinkles in the fabric and destroy the “no-iron” effect.
- Sheets with a no-iron finish will have a longer service life if they are tumbled dry and folded from the dryer rather than ironed on a flat work machine.
- Heavily soiled sheets should be separated and presoaked.
- Table linens should never be laundered with sheets.
- Sheets should be rinsed at 140 degrees F following the wash cycle. Subsequent rinses can be in cold water.
- Fabric softener, which should be used in moderation, can be added in the rinse cycle to give a smoother feel and to prevent static.

“Pilling” can occur when laundering sheets with a high polyester content. Avoid purchasing sheets that contain 50% or more polyester if this is a concern. ✧

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Eight quick tips for better laundry operations

Quick Tips	Reasoning	Benefit
Use Front Load Commercial Washers	Their intrinsic design allows less water for effective laundering	Reduces Water Consumption
Use High G Force Washers	Many commercial washers top out at about 90 RPM. If the foundation can handle a machine that reaches 200+ RPM, the hotel will save money on every load.	Reduce energy and dry time by minimizing water retention in the final spin.
Ensure that the water fill has no reductions in pipe size.	If a plumber takes a one-inch water line down to 1/2" somewhere on the way to your washer, the washer will fill more slowly and this will increase your minutes per load.	Reduces labor by shortening the minutes needed per load.
Load the washer correctly.	Load the washer by weight. There are relatively inexpensive scales that will assist laundry personnel in sizing the load. • High Absorbent Linen Types (Towels, Bath Mats, etc.): to 115 to 130% of Capacity. • Low Absorbent Linen Types (Sheets, Pillowcases, Table Linens, etc.): to 90 to 95% of Capacity. • 100% Polyester: 80 to 90% of Capacity. • Bulky items (Blankets, Spreads, etc.): Hand load. Use the same amount of water and energy whether the washer is full or empty. According to the research firm Phillips and Assoc., it costs about $.43 per pound of washer capacity for every load that is run. That totals $21.55 for a 50lb. washer, and $43.10 for a 100lb. washer.	Optimizes use of energy, water and labor.
Pair washers and dryers correctly.	35 pounds of wash when wet belongs in a 50 pound dryer. 50 pounds of wash when wet belongs in a 75 pound dryer.	Saves labor by optimizing dry time and avoiding the extra labor of splitting loads. Saves energy by operating at best design efficiency.
Minimize 90 degree elbows on dryer ductwork.	90 degree elbows increase static pressure and lengthen dry time	Saves labor by optimizing dry time and saves energy by operating at high efficiency.
Clean all dryer lint screens.	Lint build-up will reduce air flow.	Saves energy by operating at higher efficiency.
Check for adequate make-up air.	Yellow flame in the dryer indicates too little make-up air. Combustion is not optimal.	Saves energy by burning gas more efficiently.