

# Cleaning

Cleaning is another of the major services important to most facility managers. Every building of any kind, in any sector need to be kept clean whether for hygiene, good maintenance or just for appearances sake. A clean and well maintained working environment sends a positive message to customers, visitors and staff. Reducing dust, improving air quality and minimising the chances of infection can only have a beneficial impact on sick absence and productivity. Asset values can be adversely affected by poorly maintained condition or damage caused by an inappropriate cleaning regime.

General cleaning activities are frequently outsourced as part of a bundle of services that might include sweeping, dusting and vacuuming, washroom and janitorial services, waste collection and recycling. Periodic or specialist cleaning may include windows, carpets, kitchen or computer room deep cleans. Consumables like toilet paper, roller towels, rubbish sacks and personal hygiene services are also commonly included.

When specifying cleaning services it is important to decide whether to use an input or an output measurement protocol. Input specifications define the process, frequency and methodology to be utilised and performance measurement concerns the degree of compliance with that. Output specifications focus on the outcome desired and allow the cleaners to apply their own expertise to achieve the objective. Output performance is measured by the level of cleaning standard attained.

Complaints about cleaning are frequently a matter of perception. What appears clean to one person may not to another. Client and contractor must agree upon the definition of standards and jointly manage the expectations of building occupants. The financial impact of the difference between high and low cleaning standards can be great so these discussions must take place at the very start.

A professional 21<sup>st</sup> century cleaning service requires a high level of training and expertise in the safe and effective handling of chemicals and equipment. There is also significant potential for negative environmental impact through the use of non biodegradable products or the incorrect handling of waste. When selecting a cleaning contractor it is important to adequately assess their technical competence and health and safety track record.

Despite all the new technology and science involved in modern cleaning it is still a discipline dominated by people factors. There are over 250,000 people employed by the UK cleaning industry most of whom are part time unqualified women. A large percentage of the workforce are migrant workers and a lack of basic skills and language difficulties are common problems. 83% of cleaning companies employ fewer than 10 people and staff retention is low with some companies reporting turnover rates as high as 90%. The negative image that many people have about cleaning makes it hard to attract and retain new employees especially good managers. Leading cleaning companies are working hard to address these issues through investment in training programmes and improved management practice.

*For information on training and skills initiatives within the cleaning sector and for copies of standard output specifications visit the British Institute of Cleaning Science website [www.bics.org.uk](http://www.bics.org.uk) and Asset Skills [www.assetskills.org](http://www.assetskills.org) who are the Learning and Skills Council for this sector.*