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"Ask the Expert"

Is There a Proper Way to Vacuum?

Most people think vacuuming is vacuuming- you push the machine forward, backward, sideways, and you're done. I wish it was that simple.

The truth is vacuuming, just like any cleaning task, is a skill that must be learned, especially in commercial cleaning. Invariably, hotel housekeepers, who must vacuum carpets for several hours every day, are taught the most professional, fastest, safest, and effective techniques and least stressful ways to vacuum carpets. Not only do carpets come out cleaner with this knowledge, but they also last longer and so does the housekeeper.

The following are suggestions to help you and your staff vacuum like a pro:

Choose the areas to be vacuumed wisely. Not all carpet and all carpeted areas need to be vacuumed every time. Heavily trafficked areas should be vacuumed with each cleaning. For other areas, many cleaning professionals divide a room into sections, vacuuming one section one night, another section another night, etc.

Check the filter bag before vacuuming. Replace the bag when it is two-thirds full.

Scan the area to be vacuumed first and pick up any debris, paper clips, coins, etc. from the carpet before vacuuming. This protects the inner workings of the machine. Also, if the carpet is wet, avoid vacuuming until the area is dry.

To remove surface soil, slowly push the vacuum forward several feet in the direction of the pile and then reverse; vacuum in an overlapping direction.

To remove embedded soil- soil located deep in the fibers of the carpet- vacuum slowly in all directions and repeat as necessary; again, vacuum in an overlapping direction.

Change vacuuming direction from time to time. If the normal vacuuming direction is north to south, as an example, vacuum south to north occasionally- this also helps remove embedded soils.

When vacuuming steps, do not pick up the machine. Instead, use the wand and proper wand attachment if available.

When finished, always unplug the vacuum cleaner by reaching for the plug to disconnect and never pull on the cord.

A vacuum pro also knows how to care for the vacuum cleaner. If properly maintained, a commercial vacuum cleaner should last several years, but proper maintenance is imperative. The first step is listening to the machine. If the machine sounds louder than usual, this can mean a propeller fan is broken, debris is trapped in the machine, a belt is worn, or something is wrong with the motor. Also, inspect the machine. Make sure the roller brush is clean and replace if necessary.

Other maintenance suggestions include the following:

Make sure vacuum hoses are free of obstructions. Any decrease in air flow should be considered a red flag that a vacuum hose, internal or external, is clogged.

With an upright, inspect the head of the machine. Rough edges or bent metal can damage carpeting.

Inspect belts frequently to make sure they are in proper order and always keep a replacement belt handy.

Inspect the machine's filters. HEPA filters, specifically, can become heavily soiled and this can impact the machine's effectiveness.



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Follow the manufacturer's instructions regarding caring for filters; in some cases or eventually, filters may need to be replaced.

A final thought is to store the machine properly. Often kept in janitorial closets, the vacuum cleaner should not be placed near sinks or moisture. Water can prove very damaging to a vacuum.

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