Action Plans for Cleaning

Many private schools and universities teach their students about the importance of having an action plan in school, whether it is to complete assignments on time, to prepare for exams, or to get a job once they graduate. An effective action plan is designed to help students focus on their goals and then determine what steps to take—and when—to achieve them. However, action plans aren’t just for students.

Cost-Effective Cleaning Plans
Detailed action plans can also help school administrators ensure more effective—and cost-effective—cleaning and maintenance of their facilities. Without such an action plan, cleaning tasks are more likely to be skipped or—worse—forgotten, leading to an unhealthy facility environment, damage to school assets, and even a deterioration of staff and student morale.

Any cleaning action plan should be put in writing so that it can be referred to as necessary and so that
all cleaning staff know and understand the steps involved. A written custodial action plan also helps school administrators and cleaning staff to make a commitment to and follow the plan.

An effective custodial action plan would include the following steps:

**Organize.** First, establish a to-do list of cleaning activities and how often they should be performed. Some cleaning tasks will need to be performed almost every day, others just once a week, and still others, as we shall discuss, only at specific times of the year. Listing all cleaning duties will help ensure that all are performed when necessary and that no task is missed or forgotten.

**Prioritize.** Next, indicate which of the cleaning tasks are the most critical. Unexpected changes may occur with staffing or with facility requests (including those for special events), and prioritizing tasks helps ensure that the most critical cleaning tasks are not postponed.

**Set goals.** A custodial action plan should have goals. For instance, a goal might be to transfer the entire campus to green cleaning by a certain date or to reduce waste, energy, and water consumption by certain amounts in a specific time frame. An action plan should address the steps to be taken to help achieve these goals.

Administrators should also realize that changes in facility maintenance needs can occur throughout the year. Having a written custodial action plan in place makes it easier to accommodate these unforeseen changes and to integrate any new cleaning tasks into the existing plan.

**Hard Surface Floorcare Action Plan**

To show how an effective custodial action plan might work, let’s start with hard surface floorcare. Years ago, most educational institutions had policies directing that hard surface floors be stripped and refinished (what is referred to as restorative care or restoration) two or more times per year.

Over the years, labor costs and the potential negative environmental ramifications of many floorcare tasks have put a halt to many of these activities. As a result, in recent years, some administrators have stopped applying a floor finish to floors entirely.

However, here is what school administrators should know: the reason for applying a floor finish is to protect the floor; the shine that comes from the finish is a secondary benefit. Further, applying a finish to the floor makes it easier to clean and maintain, which can lead to cost savings as well.

Instead of eliminating floor refinishing, an effective custodial action plan would evaluate “how much each floor in a facility is ‘worth,’” to help determine how often and when each floor should be refinished,” advises Dave Frank, a cleaning consultant and president of the American Institute for Cleaning Sciences (AICS). “For instance, a lobby floor in a student union building is likely ‘worth’ a lot more than the hard surface floor in the mailroom in the back of the building, in terms of both visibility and foot traffic,” says Frank.

Frank suggests that administrators evaluate all hard surface floors on campus, based on both visibility and amount of foot traffic,
to determine which are high-value floors, medium-value floors, and low-value floors.

An action plan for caring for hard surface floors might look something like this:

High-value floors: Strip and refinish these floors once or twice per year. This should be done in June and possibly a second time in late November or December. Note that floors should not be stripped and refinished during the coldest winter months. Of course, these dates are approximate. Finish may not adhere properly to floors in the coldest months of the year, so restoration should be avoided during those times.

Medium-value floors: Restorative care should be performed every 12 to 18 months and should be done during the summer months.

Low-value floors: Restorative care should be performed every 18 to 24 months and should occur during the summer months.

Carpet Care Action Plan
When it comes to carpet care, the frequency of cleaning and the carpet cleaning method used depend on the type of facility and/or how it is used. For instance, upper floors in a building usually require less maintenance than lower floors, and some classrooms and offices may be used every day, while others may not.

To illustrate how a carpet care plan may be put into place, let’s assume a three-story building with carpeted classrooms, staff and executive offices, and hallways. While carpet cleaning is not as labor-intensive as hard surface floor care (but can still be costly), one issue to contend with is that, when performing carpet extraction, the carpet will remain wet for several hours after cleaning. This wetness can be a problem for those areas of the facility that are used every day; if the carpet is cleaned in the evening and classes begin early in the morning, the carpet will likely still be wet.

To determine how frequently to clean a carpet and which cleaning method to use, an effective custodial carpet care action plan would address these areas:

Classrooms: Clean the carpet using a dry cleaning method every month and a wet extraction method every third month, ideally at a time when the classroom is not being used (on a weekend or over a school break). This frequency schedule and using mainly a dry cleaning method will be less costly, less disruptive to students and staff, and more environmentally friendly.

Hallways: Carpeted halls could follow a program similar to the one used for classrooms, except a shampoo or bonnet cleaning method should be considered instead of the dry cleaning method. This is because shampoo/bonnet cleaning helps bring up the nap of the carpet, which may have become flattened due to foot traffic, and removes top surface soiling. Either way, wet extraction is necessary every third month.

Staff offices: Depending on the number of people working in the offices, the carpet can be cleaned once per year using the extraction method; this is best performed during the summer months when the offices are not used as often.

Executive offices: These areas tend to have the fewest people working in them and receive the least amount of foot traffic; in most cases,
the carpet can be cleaned every eighteen months using the extraction method.

Regardless of the area of the facility, spots on the carpet ideally should be addressed as soon as possible—usually the same day. Spots are always easier to remove when they are relatively fresh. Further, ongoing foot traffic can pound the spot deeper into carpet fibers, making it harder to remove and potentially turning a spot into a stain, which can be incredibly difficult to eliminate. Regular carpet spot treatment, once per week in commonly used areas, should be part of the action plan.

Working with a Distributor

The professional cleaning industry was once an industry that changed very slowly. Those days are over. In just the past five years, an entirely new generation of environmentally preferable cleaning solutions and products have been introduced that are superior to those manufactured years ago. In addition, technology changes have been dramatic.

The Internet of Things (IoT) has come to the cleaning industry, and automated equipment is available that can be instructed to perform some cleaning duties, such as cleaning floors, and then repeat the task over and over again without requiring the guidance of a cleaning worker.

Because of these changes and new technologies, a crucial component of any custodial care action plan is to work with a knowledgeable janitorial distributor. Some distributors now have access to online technologies that can help administrators and custodial workers select cleaning solutions and products that may be more effective—and more cost-effective—than those currently in use.

A janitorial distributor is key to helping administrators select the cleaning solutions and equipment that are right for their facilities and cleaning goals.

Finally, we must point out that even the best cleaning action plan will not succeed without proper training, which is the key to the process. In fact, the desired results may never be achieved because the plan cannot be executed without proper custodial training and education.

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