

Time to make money

Analyzing your operation and defining your systems

By Dave Frank

There is no universal formula that can be applied to your cleaning operation that will transform it into a model of efficiency. However, a comprehensive analysis of the entire cleaning operation can start moving your business toward greater productivity. An accurate assessment of operations will help identify areas for improvement.

Sound like an impossible task? Divide your evaluation into three easy-to-tackle categories: scope of work, materials and labor.

Scope of work

How long does it take your staff to clean a facility? Knowing the answer to this question (and others like it) is important. Even more crucial, though, is having an *accurate* answer. Knowing your staff's cleaning times will keep cleaning costs down, help you charge the right price for the work being done and keep your operation running at maximum efficiency.

Calculating cleaning times is as simple as using measuring tools, a calculator and a stopwatch. It is also a good idea to record your data in a spreadsheet document and plan to update it at least annually.

Start by measuring the cleanable square feet within a facility. To do this, you can pull the numbers off the architectural blueprints or CAD drawings for the facility or measure each area yourself (length times width of the area equals its square footage). When working off blueprints, double-check the figures with some actual measurements to make sure you are working with accurate numbers. Make note of the type of area, its contents and surface types.

Have your staff clean the area and record the time it takes to perform each task. Also note the tools and products used. Using the area measurements, figure out how long it takes the average worker to vacuum 1,000 square feet. Benchmarking tools such as ISSA's Cleaning Times book and APPA's custodial service levels for educational facilities can provide useful numerical references to tell you whether you are operating within the industry average.

Mechanization makes you money

When consulting ISSA's Cleaning Times, you'll see side-by-side comparisons of cleaning times for dust mopping with a 36-inch mop versus a 72-inch mop, and vacuuming using a standard upright versus ride-on sweeper, and so on. Mopping a large, open area with a 32 oz mop is going to take considerably longer than with autoscrubber. The automatic scrubber may also deliver better results.

Take some time to review your current numbers and look for areas where workers can easily increase the production rate (square feet cleaned per hour) by evaluating tools, procedures, succinct processes and equipment.



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The cost of cleaning

Labor is over 70% of the cost for many job sites and project work. By paying attention to numbers and details, you'll get a clear idea of the effectiveness of your current staffing structure.

Are the workers organized in zone assignments, a specialist routes or a blended system design? How much area does each worker have to clean and how often? What is the appearance level of the areas being cleaned? How much work is assigned to the route or zone?

Not all staff should be structured the same in every type of facility or area. Consider the space assigned to each worker and keep in mind the expected levels of cleanliness, area type and frequencies. Be realistic when tracking personnel and cleaning tasks and you'll know if a worker is taking longer than expected to finish their job.

Bring the information to the bottom line

Share the analysis with supervisors and site managers and train them to transfer the details of the analysis down to workers. Charge supervisors to explain to workers what is expected, including how long it should take to clean their zone or areas. Make sure workers and supervisors know that increasing productivity is not about doing more work in less time; it is about performing same work in less time.

Evaluating work flow and production rates will help you define productive processes and best practices, decrease labor costs and keep your operation running at maximum efficiency. Production knowledge is critical in the contacting cleaning business. It is the difference between making money and trading dollars.

Dave is the president of the American Institute for Cleaning Sciences (AICS), an independent third-party accreditation organization that establishes standards to improve the professional performance of the cleaning industry. With more than 35 years of experience, David is a leading authority in the industry, serving facility service providers, distributors and manufacturers. He can be reached at dave@aics.com.



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