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## Saving money in the laundry room: Conserving energy, time and dollars

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Keeping costs low while continuing to provide premium services for customers is a daily struggle for any operations manager. With so many areas to oversee, it's easy to overlook one of the most important—the laundry room.

It is an essential behind-the-scenes operation, where there are a number of ways to save money and still provide customers with the quality linens they expect. Newer technologies, coupled with reliable, durable, industrial-strength machines, can potentially save owners thousands of dollars.

The initial investment in laundry equipment is the most important aspect of making sure a laundry room is cost-efficient in the future. Choosing machine features such as high G-force extraction, advanced controls and industry-leading technologies, combined with proper employee processes, allows managers to operate an efficient laundry room.

### High Extraction

The best place to remove water from linens is the washer. As laundry technology advances, G-force extraction speeds continue to increase. Certain manufacturers are producing washer-extractors that spin at up to 400 G-force—removing more water from linens than lower-G-force machines.

If a laundry runs a 60-pound, 100-G machine 365 days a year and produce 12 loads a day, at \$1

per therm, it would cost approximately \$4,630 in gas to dry the linen completely. Comparatively, assuming one followed the same schedule and used the same amount of linen, the cost to dry linen in a 60-pound tumbler after withstanding 400 G-force extraction is \$2,746 a year in gas. The difference is \$1,884 per year per machine. As many hotels have multiple machines, this is a significant cost saving in just one year.

Investing in a machine that offers high G-force extraction will pay for itself over time, and help laundries reduce water and utility costs.

### Control Features

Over the last few years, manufacturers have begun to truly automate machines through the development of advanced controls. These controls typically offer additional features to help make machines more efficient and can amount to thousands of dollars in energy, maintenance and labor savings.

Some advanced controls have the ability to monitor machine performance and provide reports that show error messages, as well as maintenance information and alerts. Additionally, the reports give managers a continuous log of maintenance history, which can be used to keep track of how the machine is being used.

Alerts provide managers with important maintenance information in order to make sure machines are running at maximum efficiency. This feature helps

prevent unnecessary downtime, repair costs and disruptions in service. For example, after every 200 hours of machine use, managers are alerted that the main bearings need to be greased. This prevents unnecessary wear and tear, and allows managers to focus on other aspects of their job rather than manually recording.

Another feature allows for actual time-and-date stamping of the last 25 loads completed. With this function, managers can see what time a cycle started and ended. If long periods of time pass between cycles, it could mean employees aren't working efficiently. Reports like this can be used as a training mechanism, showing managers where supervision needs to be focused or where more training is needed.

Restricting the fast-forwarding of cycles can combat labor and quality issues. Some owners have reported employees skipping certain cycles in order to expedite the laundry process, which allows the employee to leave earlier or do less work during their shift. When this feature is turned on, managers can rest assured that the linens are being cleaned to the standards they have set and in the time frame specified.

Since labor costs are such a huge expense of the laundry operation, one other feature to look for in machine controls is a "head start" option, which allows machines to begin a cycle before employees report for the day. Employees can load the washer at day's end, then

the machine will automatically start and finish so employees can immediately move the linens to the dryer at the beginning of the next shift. This allows for one extra load to be processed per day.

### Over-Dry Prevention

Along with advanced controls, other technologies are becoming readily available for on-premise laundries, such as over-dry prevention. This technology directs the dryer to shut off when a load of linen has reached an optimal level of dryness. This reduces energy costs associated with over-drying and protects the integrity of linens, decreasing the need for replacement.

In a survey of commercial laundry distributors and laundry managers, 79% believe on-premise laundries over-dry by more than eight minutes per cycle. If this time were eliminated, annual savings could be as much as \$883 in utilities and nearly \$5,000 in labor. Also, the linens experience 31% less fiber loss when over-drying is eliminated.

### Operational Savings

An easy way that managers can make sure they're running an efficient laundry operation is by properly training employees on how to load machines. A common issue among on-premise laundries is that employees don't load machines to full capacity. Underloading machines wastes water and chemicals, and requires employees

to clean more loads of laundry, causing unnecessary wear to the machine and increases in labor expenses.

The most important decision an operations manager will make is the type of machine to be purchased. It's vital to invest properly upfront for high-quality equipment, since it will pay for itself in the long run. Make sure to invest in a machine that is built for on-premise use, and not a refitted coin machine. True OPL machines are engineered to work harder for longer periods of time.

Additionally, always look for machines that provide the lowest cost of ownership, which can be found with OPL machines that have the features described.

To understand the exact savings available, contact your local OPL distributor. Its representative will be able to provide detailed information to help increase efficiency in the laundry room. **ALN**

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