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OPL 101

Make most of on-premises laundry room space

BY BILL BROOKS

RIPON, Wis. — Operators of on-premises laundries face constant pressures to optimize the productivity of their OPLs. However, trends driving the growth of industries served by OPLs can make that difficult. These trends result in more laundry to be processed, often without increasing the footprint of the OPL accordingly.

Consider hotels, which have been upgrading both the quality and amount of linens in their guestrooms—pillows, duvets, triple sheeting—as one way to increase customer satisfaction.

In correctional facilities across the country, inmate populations have been pushing occupancy limits. Hospitals are facing reimbursement incentives to keep elderly patients in the hospital longer. Long-term care institutions are adding rooms to meet growing demand from an aging population.

Cleaning laundry is not the primary purpose of any of these enterprises, but it is still an essential part of their operation. When adding space to existing OPLs is not an option, it is in the best interests of these institutions to make sure their laundry square footage is organized and equipped to maximize throughput; save utility, water and labor costs; and produce superior wash results.

More Efficient Equipment Helps

Because changing an existing OPL layout is difficult, the best way to maintain an effective workflow and optimize laundry throughput is to upgrade to more effective and efficient washer-extractors and tumble dryers. (Before making any purchases, be sure the new equipment can fit through the building's doorways and in the available laundry room space.)

New OPL equipment can offer significant efficiency advantages. For example, a washer-extractor with 400 G-force extraction results in maximum water removal from linens, which in turn reduces the time (and utilities) needed to dry those linens. Installing a machine that utilizes unique spray rinse technology also increases OPL efficiency. Eliminating the time needed to repeatedly fill a wash tub for a bath rinse is key; spray rinse technology can decrease cycle rinse times

by up to 12%, while also providing superior rinse result compared to bath rinses alone. (A spray rinse leaves up to 22% less residual wash chemistry in the load.) Newer tumble dryer technologies also can contribute to a more efficient OPL. Sensors within dryer drums pinpoint when the load has reached the predetermined dryness level, saving the labor, utilities and linen wear-and-tear costs that result from overdrying.

How the washer-extractors and tumble dryers are situated in relationship to one another is also important to an optimized OPL workflow. Ideally, wet loads should be able to be removed from the washer and placed directly into the dryer with minimal movement. This means there should be adequate space for laundry carts to be shuttled from one machine to the next. If space is tight, don't put a table for folding and sorting linens directly across from where this transition occurs.

Another significant factor for a good workflow is ensuring that soiled laundry comes in on one side of the OPL, and leaves, clean, on the other side, with little or no cross-contamination. This is important for all OPLs, especially for those in healthcare facilities.

Advanced Controls Create Edge

Newer control systems can help optimize OPL productivity in many ways:

- Look for washer-extractors and tumble dryers that feature the same control system. This makes training staff easier and helps them quickly program the machines for different types of linen. For example, if towels take the No. 2 program to be washed, the No. 2 program on the tumble dryer will also dry them.
- The best control systems monitor how the equipment is being used—the time between starts and stops, whether the correct wash or dry program is utilized, etc.—and provide reports that let managers see where efficiency can be improved.
- With some control systems, a washer-extractor can be loaded at the end of the workday and programmed to process the load just before the next day starts. The load is ready to go into the tumble



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dryer as soon as operators arrive in the morning, and the OPL gets a jump on its workload.

- Advanced controls also provide a time countdown to the end of the cycle so laundry workers know when a load will finish and can be prepared with a cart to transfer the wet laundry to a tumble dryer. Such systems also feature the ability to send text messages or other types of alerts when a load is complete, or even minutes before the cycle ends. These "alert" features allow employees to perform other tasks, such as folding, without having to stop and check if the washer-extractor is done; they also help prevent idle or underutilized equipment.
- In a healthcare facility, the control system on washer-extractors can ensure that linens are washed at a high enough temperature for a specified period of time, and documents in a report that the appropriate sanitizing procedure was followed. This both prevents operator error and avoids time-consuming monitoring and reporting that would have to be done by an individual.
- A good control system also sends alerts when regularly sched-

uled maintenance is required, ensuring that the OPL equipment keeps running smoothly.

Equipment Reliability is Key

Equally important to a well-run OPL as efficient equipment is choosing equipment that is durable and reliable. True OPL equipment should be built to stand up to 24/7 use, year in and year out, even if the OPL does not operate around the clock. No matter how well laid out an on-premises laundry is, if its machines break down or need constant repairs, efficiency goes out the door.

Nothing is less cost-effective than sending an institution's laundry out to be cleaned while the OPL manager waits for a part that's on back order. A reputable and knowledgeable distributor can recommend the best equipment for a space-challenged OPL, offer a high level of service and, if a repair is necessary, provide quality replacement parts delivered the next day.

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