

American LAUNDRY NEWS

FEBRUARY 2014

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20 FEBRUARY 2014 | AMERICAN LAUNDRY NEWS

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OPL 101

How does one decide to replace equipment?

Repair record, new-technology benefits can point to need

BY BILL BROOKS

RIPON, Wis. — Determining whether or not to replace equipment is a decision that every on-premises laundry manager must face eventually. When that time

comes, there are several things to consider before making an investment in new equipment.

COST OF REPAIR

One of the first indications it is time to replace equipment is

frequent repairs. A good rule of thumb is that it is time to replace when the cumulative cost of constant repairs exceed the price of new equipment.

For example, if new equipment costs \$5,000 and its average life

span is 10 years, then an operator can estimate spending about \$500 per year for that equipment. If an older piece of equipment starts to cost \$1,000 per year to repair, then it would be advisable to upgrade to a newer model.

NEW TECHNOLOGY

Another reason to consider replacing old equipment is when

the benefit of new technologies quickly outweighs the initial cost of the new equipment. This immediate return on investment can be experienced through decreased utility bills, increased linen life and improved linen quality and comfort after processing. Let's take a look at some of the opportunities available.

Control Systems

Today, industry-leading commercial laundry manufacturers are producing controls that help to measure an OPL's success by monitoring equipment use and operating efficiency. Managers cannot



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improve what they cannot measure; being able to pull reports and view performance data on-screen will ensure machines are operating at peak efficiency. Upgrading equipment with a new, easy-to-use control system can help managers track operating costs, maintenance, labor and other key performance indicators to pinpoint areas where efficiency can be improved.

New machines with updated control systems can do more than just decrease utility costs. They can help to monitor how efficiently staff is operating the machines by recording cycle-start and -stop times; machine imbalance, which is an indicator of poor loading practices; and whether the correct cycles are being run. This is a significant reason to upgrade considering that labor accounts for as much as 45-50% of an OPL operator's expenses.

If operators choose to upgrade to machines with a new control system, they should be sure to test it out prior to installation. Look for a system that will simplify training and operations with a

user-friendly graphic display. Make training easier with customizable languages and pre-programmed one-touch operation that allows an attendant to select a cycle program, such as one specifically for towels or another for bed linens, and click start.

Washer-Extractors

When considering the replacement of an old washer-extractor, there are several new technologies to keep in mind:

- **G-Force** — High-G-force extraction is potentially the most important investment an OPL operator can make. Washer-extractors with 400 G-force decrease drying times, reduce gas and labor costs, and increase throughput. That decreased drying time can exponentially increase the life of linens.
- **Spray Rinse Technology** — Spray rinse technology uses less water and delivers a more effective rinse compared to bath rinses alone. The spray rinse technology helps to increase throughput by up to 12% because of shorter cycle times. It also consumes as much as 39% less water without sacrificing wash quality.
- **Customizable Cycles** — To further increase utility savings, look for washer-extractors with a wide range of customizable cycles that help to coordinate the right wash cycle with linen type. Some of these cycles may be considered eco-friendly and reduce water use. Programmable water levels also allow operators to control water usage for different types of linens and different load sizes.

Tumble Dryers

A recent survey found that 79% of commercial laundry distributors and commercial laundry managers believe that OPLs over-dry linens by more than eight minutes per cycle. This cost of over-drying can be seen in higher utility and labor costs, and shorter linen life.

By upgrading to tumble dryers with over-dry prevention technology, linens can experience up to 31% less fiber loss. Look for a machine that features a sophisticated rotary transfer switch, which enables the system to sense dryness levels thousands of times per cycle for accurate readings, eliminating the need for guessing when linens are dry.

By automatically shutting off when the appropriate dryness level is reached, the machine eliminates the need for an attendant to repeatedly check to see whether or not the linens are dry, or to program a longer dry time just to be sure. When over-drying is no longer an issue, an OPL operator saves on labor and utility costs while also increasing throughput.

PLANNING AHEAD

These new technologies may not factor into a replacement decision unless the OPL operator has all the

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necessary information. Operators should make sure they know the age of their current equipment so

they know when to start considering replacement. Once a machine needs repeated maintenance, a manager should request a laundry operating analysis from their distributor and start to investigate new equipment and receive a quote. This foresight can help to decrease laundry room downtime should equipment break down and need to be replaced immediately.

Speak with a knowledgeable distributor about whether or not the OPL should be upgraded with more than one piece of equipment at a time. Generally, operators should prioritize the replacement

of the oldest and lowest-quality equipment first; however, if the cost of installation is offset by the benefit of replacing all equipment, then an operator should consider upgrading across the board.

Additionally, if an operator chooses to upgrade all equipment, it is recommended to use machines with a control platform that is identical on both washer-extractors and tumble dryers. This makes the new set-up easy to use and more efficient for employees.

Finally, when consider-

ing replacing existing machines, look for a manufacturer that has a reputation for producing reliable, long-lasting equipment, proven in a state-of-the-art test lab. New machines represent a significant investment and should function

for 10-15 years, so make sure that the equipment is up for that challenge. **ALN**



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