

# American LAUNDRY NEWS

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## Long-term care laundry solutions

### Why equipment selection shouldn't be based on price alone

BY MARK DEJESUS

WARD, Ark. — The long-term care market is expected to see steady growth in the foreseeable future. Total revenues were anticipated to reach \$289.5 billion at end of 2012, and looking ahead to 2015, that figure is predicted to rise to \$353.5 billion, according to Kalorama Information, a leading publisher of market research in medical markets.

The increase can be attributed to an aging population — those 65 and older, as defined by the U.S. Administration on Aging. This demographic represents roughly 12.9% of the U.S. population, or about one in every eight Americans. As these predictions become reality, long-term care facilities will need to expand their businesses to meet the population's needs.

While facility managers plan for future growth, they will need to consider their laundry operations. Residents and their family members are becoming increasingly discerning about the level of services provided and are turning a keen eye to the appearance and cleanliness—or lack thereof—of linens and textiles. Laundry equipment plays an essential role in meeting quality standards. Clean and fresh-smelling linens, towels and garments impact the comfort level of patients, residents and visitors, so finding a way to increase throughput without compromising cleaning quality is a must.

#### TRUE OPL MACHINES

Although revenue is up, costs and government reimbursement rates are an ongoing issue, so understanding the difference between price and cost of laundry is essential. When the time comes to purchase new laundry equipment, some decision-makers commit the common mistake of looking only at the initial investment instead of the lifespan costs associated with the machines.

Laundry equipment needs to be able to withstand the rigors of at least 10 cycles per day, seven days a week. True on-premise laundry machines are built to provide reliable and durable performance, and are

equipped with state-of-the-art technologies required to exceed cleanliness standards, as well as maintain the quality of linens. And in the long run, the right machines will cost less to operate and save facilities money.

Let's look at the financial impacts using a 117-bed facility as an example, considering its use of two 60-pound washer-extractors and two 75-pound tumble dryers.

#### LIFESPAN

A machine designed to handle on-premise laundry should last 48,000 cycles, which is equal to more than 13 loads each day for 10 years. Other commercial laundry machines sold for OPL use, but manufactured for the coin laundry industry, are typically designed to last between 20,000 and 30,000 cycles, or five years at 13 loads per day.

Using our example, with a true OPL machine, laundry personnel will be able to process more than 2,500 tons of laundry over the equipment's lifespan, while other machines may process 1,275 tons.

#### WHAT'S ON THE INSIDE?

The components of the machines are critical. For example, steel helps machines handle vibration and unbalanced loads effortlessly. Additionally, the cylindrical front and spherical rear bearings should be able to handle 200% more force than traditional machine ball bearings used in most cabinet washer-extractors. And lastly, the machine motors should have nearly 70% more horsepower, enabling it to handle around-the-clock use.

#### ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY

Machine features and benefits are enhanced with advanced technologies, which can reduce labor and utility costs by improving operational efficiency. With labor consuming 45-50% of the OPL dollar, and utilities another 8-12%, it's easy to see how technologies that reduce energy consumption and increase throughput can impact the bottom line, and help save the facility money.

The natural gas used to heat water and to run dryers is the most expensive utility in the laundry, but also the most controllable.

OPL washer-extractors will offer high G-force extraction. High extraction speeds maximize water removal, reducing dry times and costs. Some manufacturers offer up to 400 G-force, compared to those that max out with an extraction speed of 100 G-force.



(Photo: ©iStockphoto/Dean Mitchell)

#### CAN YOU AFFORD THE INITIAL INVESTMENT?

By investing a little more up front on laundry equipment, it's possible to recognize considerable savings over the long run.

Two 60-pound washer-extractors and two 75-pound tumble dryers, for example, would require an up-front investment of roughly \$30,000, approximately \$5,000 more than less-efficient, non-OPL equipment. But when you consider the total savings over the course of 10 years using the true OPL machines, the facility would have saved more than \$184,000.

Purchasing any laundry equipment represents a significant investment, so it is important to understand the options. That is where a knowledgeable distributor comes into play. Look for a distributor that represents an OPL brand that offers machines that will save you money in the long run and meet your facility's needs.

#### LEARN FROM OTHERS

When Woodruff County Medical Center in McCroy, Ark., opened a new location with 120 beds, management had to adhere to a strict laundry operations budget. The Center's existing location used one brand of equipment, but for the new facility, management chose a different brand based on a lower initial price.

Not long after the installation of three washers and dryers was complete, the machines started having maintenance issues. For example, over the course of their use,

each machine's computer had to be replaced. The distributor was unable to find the necessary parts to repair the machines, which led to some machines being inoperable for up to three weeks. The breakdowns forced staff to take linens to a local Laundromat and to use disposable paper products instead of washable linens.

After six years and about \$4,000 in labor costs not covered under warranty, the facility decided it needed to make a change.

#### TOTAL COST OF OWNERSHIP

Unfortunately, situations like the one Woodruff faced happen frequently. And with many residents and their family members demanding high-level cleanliness quality, many organizations can't afford to have a misstep that will put the company at risk.

When considering laundry operations, make sure purchase price is not the only criteria used for selecting machines. The total cost of ownership should be the driving consideration. Take the time to conduct research and make sure your distributor partner offers true OPL machines.

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