

# Is Your Carpet *REALLY* Clean?

The best way to clean your hands or laundry is to wash with hot water and soap and then thoroughly rinse. But what is the best way to clean your fine carpet and area rugs?

Is it better to wet clean or dry clean? When and how should my carpets be cleaned? Will professional cleaning damage my carpet fiber and make it wear out faster? My carpets don't look dirty so why should they be professionally cleaned?

Leading carpet manufacturers and the Carpet & Rug Institute agree that the two most important factors for properly maintaining and cleaning carpet are: 1) regular vacuuming and 2) professional cleaning every 6-18 months depending on household traffic.

Loose soil deposits from common foot traffic are your carpet's worst enemy. To the naked eye soil may appear smooth but, under a microscope, common soil has sharp jagged edges that act like little tiny saws or sandpaper, cutting into the carpet fiber when agitated by normal foot traffic. Regular and thorough vacuuming will remove up to 75-80% of the dry, loose soil trapped in carpet fibers. The remaining 20-25% of deeply imbedded soil must be removed periodically by professional cleaning to prevent premature wear and permanent damage.

While there are many different professional carpet cleaning methods, they typically fall into two categories - "wet cleaning" and "dry cleaning". Let's examine each.

## **Dry Cleaning**

There are several variations of dry cleaning. They involve applying a liquid or sawdust like substance to the carpet, spreading it around, and then vacuuming up the dried substance along with the soil. Unfortunately, it doesn't actually rinse the carpet fibers, it leaves residue which attracts more soil and it doesn't reach deep down into the carpet fiber to extract the deeply embedded soil. Dry cleaning is usually recommended for interim cleaning, typically in commercial settings where wet cleaning is not feasible. Many cleaners offer dry cleaning to homeowners as a cleaning method of first choice because it is easier and less expensive for them, not because it produces the best results.

## **Hot Water Extraction**

Also known as steam cleaning, it involves applying a cleaning agent deep into the carpet fibers to emulsify the embedded soil, then injecting hot fresh water deep down into the carpet fibers to rinse the stubborn soil, and then "extracting" the soiled water and cleaning agent with a high powered wet vacuum. When performed by properly trained technicians, it provides the most thorough cleaning possible without leaving any harmful residues. That is why the two largest carpet manufacturers, Mohawk and Shaw, recommend this method and will actually void your warranty if this method is not used! Critics of water extraction point to long dry times but, when done properly, there should be very little moisture left after extraction and any inconvenience is far outweighed by the superior cleaning results.

Simply put, the best way to clean your hands or laundry is to wash with hot water and soap and then thoroughly rinse. The same is true for your carpet and rugs...

*By Chris Callas, President & CEO, QCare, Inc*