

## 5. ACT Industry Survey on Cleaning

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### **Background**

The October 2010 ACT Cleaning Survey was conducted as a follow-up to the Durability Survey of October 2009. The Durability Survey revealed the extent to which members considered cleaning to be a contributing factor to a textile product's performance, life span, and overall durability. The ACT Technical Committee determined that further exploration was necessary to understand current cleaning challenges in the contract textile industry.

The goal of the survey was not to establish or revise cleaning guidelines, codes or methods but rather to provide a forum for members to communicate their current concerns and issues related to these topics, and to explore what sources members were turning to for information. The intent of this paper is to report current best practices and bring awareness to common issues on a complex subject.

## **Survey Conclusions**

The 2010 ACT Cleaning Survey provided interesting information. Cleaning has become more complex in order to accommodate a wide range of fabrics and coated materials, finishes and environments. The survey results highlight specific concerns relating to sustainability, healthcare requirements, performance finishes and the variety of cleaning products available.

1. The vast majority of ACT members do provide some level of cleaning recommendation for their end-users, and they typically communicate this information via the specifier. Most members incorporate the cleaning symbols W, W-S, S and X into their recommendations.
2. ACT members rely on a number of resources, including mills and finish suppliers, to develop cleaning recommendations. Some also use multi-attribute testing to evaluate stain removal.
3. The two biggest challenges in the field are lack of regular cleaning or maintenance, and improper cleaning. Members pointed out that:
  - they have little control over whether or not cleaning is conducted by end-users, or how it is conducted;
  - improper cleaning leads to damage and/or premature wear—resulting in claims that are difficult to resolve.
4. The survey clearly indicates that end-users expect detailed cleaning recommendations, stain removal instructions and guidance on what cleaning products and methods to use, particularly in healthcare.
5. In the healthcare environment, ACT members are challenged by intensifying cleaning requirements that include harsh chemistries such as bleach, ammonia, and hydrochloric acid.
6. A new significant trend is end-users' interest in water-based and/or green cleaners due to concern about indoor air quality and toxicity.
7. Effective stain removal continues to be a concern—especially food, beverage and ink stains.
8. The survey also indicates that reverse crocking has become a significant issue. With the recent trend of dark wash “vintage” denim, migrating dyes from clothing are permanently staining upholstery. Obviously, this is not a function of the upholstery fabric and coated materials; however, end-users are turning to ACT members for guidance.

## ACT Cleaning Survey Results – October 2010

31 Participants (27 distributors / 1 mill / 3 furniture manufacturers)

1. Do you provide cleaning instructions as standard practice?

Yes 29

No 2

7 comments: Participants communicate cleaning information online, on sample tags, with orders and/or upon request.

2. Are you using the W, S, WS and X symbols on your fabrics and literature?

Yes 24

No 7

6 comments: All 3 furniture manufacturers participating do not use the symbols; 2 respondents were not familiar with "X."

3. If no, what do you use?

International Care Symbols

General Cleaning Recommendations

- Specific written cleaning recommendations for fabric based on fiber content
- Specific written cleaning recommendations for coated materials
- Specific written cleaning recommendations as supplied by branded product
- Laundering instructions

4. If yes, what means do you use to determine the cleaning method for your product?

In-house testing 10

Mill / fabric supplier 26

Independent lab testing 6

Comments: Combination of all three sources listed above; best practices given the fiber content.

**5. When recommending cleaning methods, do you take into consideration the finish that you will be applying to the fabric?**

Yes 25  
No 3

*Comments: Cleaning recommendations become more complex if a branded finish is applied, because both the fiber content as well as the finish need to be considered.*

**6. What are the most common concerns your customers have about cleaning?**

- 10 What kind of cleaner and what method to use
- 7 Stain removal
- 5 Ink
- 2 Denim indigo
- 2 Food
- 2 Beverage
- 5 Change in appearance
- 4 Cleaning with bleach
- 4 Cleaning with proprietary cleaning agents
- 4 Will the cleaning be effective?
- 4 Most want easy-cleanable fabrics
- 2 The facility will not know how to maintain products
- 1 Specialized performance expectations for healthcare and hospitality
- 1 Having to use solvent-based cleaning solutions; would prefer water-based cleaning solutions
- 1 Cleaning method will void warranties
- 1 Cleaning will remove any topical finish, affecting flammability or performance
- 1 Disinfecting

**7. Do you experience reluctance from end-users who don't want to use cleaning solvents?**

Yes 12  
No 19

*Comments: Environmental concerns; accessibility to solvent-based cleaners; cost of professional cleaning; preference to clean in-facility with water-based cleaners; want specific brand of cleaner recommendation; no control over what is actually used despite cleaning instructions; not following specific brand cleaner recommendation.*

**8. Are cleaning considerations a part of your product development process?**

Yes 23  
No 8

**9. If yes, what percentage of your products?**

- 8 100%
- 2 90%
- 1 75%
- 2 60%
- 2 50%
- 2 40%
- 2 35%
- 2 30%
- 1 15%
- 1 10%
- 8 no answer given

**10. What environmental requirements relating to cleaning are you asked to meet?**

- 15 None
- 9 Want to be able to use water-based cleaners and/or green cleaners related to good indoor air quality; void of PFOS/PFOA and silicones.

**11. What are the cleaning requirements you are asked for in healthcare installations?**

- 23 Bleach cleanable
- 6 Branded disinfectants that kill blood-borne pathogens; EPA registered - Virex / Virox
- 4 Proprietary cleaning agents
- 4 General disinfectant cleaners
- 3 Antimicrobial
- 3 Quaternary cleaners (ammonium)
- 2 Laundering temperatures in excess of 160 degrees / tumble-dried
- 1 Cleanable with water-based cleaners
- 1 Stain-resistant fabric that can be laundered
- 1 Specific cleaning instructions - routines, periodic maintenance, incidental cleaning
- 1 Alcohol wipes
- 1 Phenolic cleaners (coal tar)

**12. Where do you go for technical information regarding cleaning?**

- 20 Mills / finisher
- 6 Cleaning service companies & organizations
- 5 Internet research - Websites for cleaning product manufacturers
- 5 Test labs
- 5 Internal research / testing
- 4 Internet research - general
- 3 Internet research - Websites for branded products
- 2 Fiber manufacturer / yarn supplier
- 2 MSDS sheets
- 1 Industry colleague

**13. Please describe your three most common claims related to fabric cleaning?**

***Stains***

- 9 Cannot remove stain
- 6 Ink / marker
- 5 Oily dirt
- 4 Indigo denim dye
- 3 Food
- 1 Iodine

***Improper Cleaning***

- 15 Improper cleaners or cleaning method causes damage and premature wear
- 6 Fading
- 3 Lack of cleaning
- 2 Pilling
- 2 Shrinking
- 2 Cracking and drying out of coated materials from the wrong cleaners used
- 2 Maintenance staff lack of knowledge
- 1 Over-saturation of fabric, resulting in moldy cushions
- 1 Fading due to use of bleach
- 1 Cleaning removes finish
- 1 Delamination of coated materials due to improper cleaners used

***Finishes***

- 1 Stain-repellant treatment not effective
- 1 Difficulty cleaning after FR applied

***Improper Laundering***

- 1 Burrs in laundry machine and dryer creates snags
- 1 Improper detergent
- 1 Pilling or wrinkling after laundering

**14. Rank the following reasons for claims relating to cleaning:**

- 1 Improperly cleaned (14)
- 2 Not cleaned at all (9)
- 3 Proper cleaning instructions were ineffective (6)

**15. What percentage of your cleaning claims is related to product that has an after-market finish applied?**

- 18 less than 10%
- 3 10% - 50%
- 1 51% - 75%
- 3 76% - 100%

**16. Using the chart below, estimate how many cleaning/staining problems you have had by market type/end use and fabric type during the past twelve months. If this detailed information is not available, please provide your estimates in the total columns on the bottom and side.**

Information obtained was not statistically valid.

**17. Any additional comments?**

- Most of our cleaning claims are on coated fabrics. Most of our cleaning questions are on textiles.
- We sometimes have cleaning claims on textiles and coated materials specified for the wrong end-use.
- In general terms, we have not had claims on natural fibers. The issues have been on synthetic fibers, particularly when stain-repellent treated.
- Most of our complaints are resolved by our corrective actions and do not result in an actual claims. We provide proper care information with our cleaning manuals and technical services.
- Most cleaning issues have to do with lack of care in the field.
- I actually see more wear issues vs. cleaning issues; for example, premature wearing on arms of chairs, puddling on sofas, seams opening on fronts of swivel tilt chairs, etc.
- Some customers mistakenly think that a stain repellent or other specialty finish will make it so the fabric does not need to be cleaned or maintained. They also believe that the finish is good forever no matter what type of cleaning is done.
- We also have installer inquiries about how to remove wallcovering adhesive or dirt from the face of wallcoverings that happened during installation.
- Mildew on outdoor product is our main issue currently.
- Occasionally we are aware that our products are cleaned improperly, but the client does not typically hold the company responsible for the mistake.
- There is confusion about exactly what any specific finish will do to enhance a product and how a finish will affect cleaning. There are so many stain-repellent finishes that we are trying to keep our finishing options to a minimum to better control what our clients are receiving.