

# CLEANING

## The Forgotten Division

By Denise Dabbagh, American Carpet Care & Janitorial

**S**tuck somewhere between General Conditions and Soil Remediation, there lies the specification for Final Construction Cleaning to deliver to a customer their new building.

Cleaning is considered, for the most part, as incidental and usually does not qualify as a major expense. It's something for which estimators often plug in a square footage number; it's often not considered a significant cost item that could drastically vary depending on design and site conditions. This forgotten division should be a part of the competitive bid process. This will have a positive impact to budget, schedule and closeout procedures.

Current construction clean-up costs range from .10 cents to \$1.00+ per square foot. No magic number there. Contractors are faced with pulling a number out of a hat and hope that the trick works. It's the fear of losing a bid that creates the submission of very lean numbers at bid time. The general thought process that cleaning is insignificant enough that someone on-site with a broom can handle it, mitigates this. Given the current economic climate, combined with the desire to keep labor busy, there's no doubt that some general contractors are putting their finished product and reputation at risk by implementing this method.

A general estimate is without consideration of special cleaning needs, such as high glass cleaning and specialty floor treatments. It does not take into account, for example, the specification requiring the cleaning of all owner-provided shelving and fixtures. Restaurants contain specialty equipment, healthcare facilities have exam rooms with special cleaning needs, and there's special TLC required for the owner who takes occupancy prior to the turnover of the building. Also not included are jobsite conditions that exacerbate the matter, such as restoring unprotected floors, high duct work, and paint scraping from most every surface that was victim to your lowest bid painter. Cleaning during punch work is an orchestrated performance. If planned and executed with finesse, your cleaning crew can drive your finish.

### PETOSKEY PLACE APARTMENTS, DETROIT

A good example of this is Petoskey Place Apartments, a large multi-family residential housing project, finished in phases, over a large site. The field supervisor was at a disadvantage when the project was at its finish point. 250 doors got locked (and unlocked and locked, etc...) and balancing punch crews of all trades with scheduled inspection and owner walk-throughs looming. This project was handled seamlessly by the cleaning crew of American Carpet Care and Janitorial

Services, Livonia, taking ownership, contributing to the phasing schedule, securing locked areas, communicating with all punch crews and moving along the project to a successful finish on time with no extra cleaning costs. The defense against being backed into the corner to make your delivery date is a proactive approach to the Cleaning Division.

### THE WINDOW GUY DOESN'T DO WINDOWS AND THE FLOOR GUY DOESN'T DO FLOORS

Now, more than ever, the current economic times affect your budget and, at Value Engineering time, cleaning is an item placed so low on the totem pole that sometimes the customer will even elect to wash their own windows.

There is a lot of room to shift the responsibility of cleaning, especially with the inconsistencies of specifications either allocating all phases of cleaning to the general contractor or, in the majority of specs, have divisions bearing cost-impacting finishes, protection and cleaning requirements that often are not the expertise of the installation trades. Granted there are many trades that often self perform these finishes or have great relationships with janitorial trades to subcontract this portion, but many more trades exclude this work, not motivated by the idea of going back 3-6 months after their installations to assess what it would take to restore their brand new work. Some may say that it's







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hard to get some trades back out to the project when you have mortar on your windows and the floors have been trashed.

#### THE ESTIMATING PROCESS

Estimating for general contracting relies on the subcontractors to 'dissect' their scope of work and advise of 'definable features of work' that otherwise have a chance of going undetected. The subcontractors'

review of the plans and specs is the lifeline of the estimator, especially in fast track, crucial bid times.

It makes sense to rely on the cleaning professionals to provide you the same estimating service. And more importantly, to obtain costs for items that trades often exclude. Too often "Scope Busts" uncover underlying features that will eat up your profits... and they never do it in the beginning of a project, do they?

Example - Scope Bust: In the 125 RFIs and 13 change orders, the scope was changed partially from carpet to tile. A change order is issued based on your floor sub's quote that did not include finishes while the specifications require an almost unheard of amount: six (6) coats of a premium sealer over 10,000 square feet of tile. Whether it is the general contractor or the subcontractor, someone is going to bear this cost, somewhere in excess of thousands of dollars.

Example - Late Contract and Bad Scheduling: A three-story elaborate window enclosure is installed, the glazing trade demobilizes and six months later the landscaping is in and you're ready to clean the windows. The lift can't be used now, inside or out, and you just discovered concrete on the lower panes. Now what? It will be either the glazing trade (that clearly excluded the cleaning - but find it in their contract) or the general contractor (or a negotiation of the two). Either way, it's time to consume these costs.

Based on quality control averages, contracting firms with militant on-site management, the support of corporate offices, and in-place company processes to protect all work on the project, are a very small percent of the contractors doing business. These firms are to be com-

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mended, as they are the leaders of our industry.

On the other hand, firms that leave the competitive bidding, selection, work scope and contract to a late decision or to field supervisors, often find the cleaning overlooked and let out at the end of the project. The project's end (fast track) schedule may dictate last minute efforts utilizing non-prequalified subcontractors or in-house labor. This may get the job done adequately, however this method is futile in removing grease from concrete, asphalt from carpet or other tricky jobsite problems.

#### **CAMPUS MARTIUS PARK, AUBON PAIN BUILDING EXTERIOR 2005/DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS, PROJECT SERVICES 2007**

These projects are good examples of high profile and high pressure finishes. Both projects were faced with the sensational task of a televised opening. The importance in these cases elevated things to levels that would usually override any best-laid plans. The crews of American Carpet Care and Janitorial Services were available for immediate deployment to the sites, and they put forth their efforts to help unveil the spectacular expansions and rebirth of these long awaited projects. It was a daunting task. Amid the trades finishing their work, there were stage and tent erectors, sound and light crews, artists, performers, decorators and caterers. The mission of the company for both projects was to eliminate any new construction residue, quickly and efficiently. Their tasks varied from pressure washing, stainless steel and window cleaning, polishing acres of marble, to vacuuming the red carpet on their way out.

A chosen cleaning company should be an established firm, fully

insured, and one that has in-place safety procedures and specializes in all types of construction clean up. This company should take full "ownership" of the clean delivery of the project. Retain this company from the start of the project. Include contract provisions for intermittent inspection by the cleaning company at milestones throughout the project, to call attention to site conditions that will affect their work, as any other trade would. For example, before the HVAC trade begins work, they are on-site assessing the work of the electrician, plumber and carpenter. As a subcontractor, advising, informing and educating the general contractor is a service that provides value for everyone.

Your cleaning contractor would then be able to tell you that it would be better to clean the skylights prior to hanging the cable tray that, when in place, would require scaffolding. These pre-work assessments save the general and the subcontractor time and money!

#### **BACK-CHARGES: DIRTY WORDS ON THE JOBSITE**

When it comes to cleaning, your trades, if given the option to clean up or leave it behind with no reprisals, will most likely do the latter. Construction managers who don't retain a grip on the clean-up rules and procedures on a jobsite will ultimately lose control of jobsite cleaning efforts.

Therefore, have your cleaning crew on-site to inspect a pile of debris that no one will claim. Have them take pictures, itemize debris categories and provide full documentation for your back-charge. Having your cleaning crew policing this will enable the processing and enforcement of your Notice to Cure and/or subsequent back-charge. *Note: Put this practice in place early and you may only have*

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to do it once. When the proper rules are in place, posted at the site, included in subcontracts, and implemented daily, jobsite harmony and sub cooperation will be maintained.

With regard to back-charges, the general contractors (even trades to third-tier subs) should be proactive by doing the following:

- Merely speaking of back-charges, verbal only notification, or failing to follow through, will only breed uncontrolled contract breaches, fighting about trash and a mess of a jobsite.
- Declare cleanliness and safety on your jobsite. Sometimes it's tough, but if you make

this declaration as depicted above, you will have a clean and safer jobsite.

In order to combat unexpected costs for clean-up efforts at the end of a project, follow these eight important tips:

- Estimating methods should include Cleaning as a Division. Compressively bid construction clean up at bid time, including floor treatments, concrete sealers, glass and glazing, exterior building wash and jobsite janitorial for larger projects.
- Qualify and contract cleaning at the start of a project, and review all in-place processes for clean-up and on-site maintenance.
- Require monthly inspections, as needed, for feedback from the cleaning contractor.
- Utilize the cleaner for documentation and motivation to the subcontractors to clean up. Review all back-charge policies and current implementation methods.
- Allow the cleaner to participate and aid in coordinating punch list efforts. Final coordination by the cleaner will deter extra charges caused by callbacks that could have been avoided.
- Practice dedication and diligence regarding quality control guidelines and procedures to protect work in place.
- As much as the schedule will allow, make sure that the cleaner is the last trade on-site prior to owner and architect walk-through.
- Negotiate a final touch-up to be included in the contract, and obtain fixed costs for multiple touch-ups. However, if the previous seven tips are followed, the project turnover should be running smoothly with outstanding trades, and there should be no need for multiple attempts to clean up after punch list crews.

In conclusion, if you've ever experienced a strained relationship with an owner or architect due to a project end's execution of the cleaning, process, or with significant hits to your bottom line, then evaluate the following: good cleaners consider cleaning an art. It is a spectacular process to take something out of the debris and make it shine like a new penny. There is a satisfaction in doing a quality job and making every trade's work look good. ☺

*American Carpet Care and Janitorial Services, based in Livonia, is owned and operated by Adam and Denise Dabbagh. Both have backgrounds in construction and a lifetime of experience delivering buildings from both the general contracting end and the janitorial sides of construction. Serving all of Southeast Michigan and Ohio, the company's website is: [www.americancarpetcare.us](http://www.americancarpetcare.us)*

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