



Consumer Guide to Carpet Cleaning



TRI-COUNTY CARPET CARE'S

Consumer Guide to Carpet Cleaning



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Introduction

Many of us have carpet in our homes and businesses. If properly maintained, carpet can be a great way to improve the health of your indoor living environment. Why? Carpet acts like a giant sponge. It attracts toxins and pollutants that we track inside on our clothing and bodies. That means that things like soil, mold spores, pollens, cigarette smoke, and car exhaust settle into our carpet every day. Fortunately, this temporarily helps to keep all of these things out of the air that you breathe. Unfortunately, like any type of air filter, your carpet eventually gets full of these contaminants. When your carpet is full, it starts to release the pollutants back into the air whenever you walk on it. That's why it's critical to keep your carpet clean and properly maintained.

Your carpet maintenance schedule should include: regular vacuuming, spot cleaning when needed, and professional carpet cleaning at set intervals.

Choosing a professional carpet cleaner isn't easy. You are bombarded with misleading advertising, confusing claims and simply bad information. From super-low prices and high-pressure sales to unqualified technicians and near worthless cleaning methods, how do you ever find a qualified, competent and professional carpet cleaner?

You start by reading this Consumer Guide to Carpet Cleaning. In this fact filled booklet, you'll discover how to avoid common mistakes and rip-offs.

We wrote this guide to help you to better understand carpet cleaning. With this information, you can make an informed, intelligent decision when selecting the right carpet cleaning professional for you and your family.

We've dedicated our business to education consumers. If you have any questions about carpet or upholstery cleaning that aren't covered in this booklet, you are always welcome to call us at (510) 734-6756. We'll be happy to help you in any way possible.

Which Carpet Cleaning Method Cleans Best?

There are several different methods of carpet cleaning from which to choose. We strongly recommend the hot water extraction method in almost all cases, but we think it's important that you understand each process before deciding which method is best for you.

Dry Foam: The carpet cleaner applies shampoo to the carpet, allows it to dry, and then – without rinsing – sucks the dried shampoo into a vacuum. Can you imagine applying shampoo to your hair, allowing it to dry and then removing the shampoo from your head with a vacuum? This method leaves dirty residue in your carpet, which is one reason why dry foam is not a very effective method of cleaning.

Absorbent Pad (Bonnet Cleaning): This method is similar to dry foam, except a large cotton bonnet is set on your carpet while a buffer machine “buffs” the carpet. The rotating motion causes the bonnet to absorb dirt from your carpet. This method is also called bonnet cleaning. Bonnet cleaning is like using a large cotton towel to rub the dirt out of your carpet. It's not very effective.

Dry, Absorbent Powder: The dry-compound method spreads a mist, absorbent powder throughout the carpet. The powder is allowed to dry, and then sucked into a vacuum. This method leaves dry sponge particles at the base of the carpet yarn. Because the carpet isn't rinsed, this method is not very effective.

Hot Water Extraction: This is a fancy way of saying that a hot water cleaning solution under high pressure is forced into your carpet and then sucked out of your carpet. Some people refer to this as “steam cleaning.”

In a recent Technical Bulletin, Shaw Industries, the world's largest carpet manufacturer, “recommends the hot water extraction system, which research indicates provides the best capability for cleaning.”

You can choose from two different types: Truck-mount extraction, which is done with a large machine mounted on a truck or van; Portable extraction, which is done with a small, hand-held unit.

Which type to choose? Shaw's Technical Bulletin states "[cleaning] can be done from a truck-mounted unit outside the facility with only the hose and wand brought inside, or where the truck-mounted unit cannot reach, by a portable, self-contained system brought into the facility."

As you can see, Shaw recommends the truck-mounted unit first. This isn't surprising. The truck-mounted unit cleans much better because it heats the water to a higher temperature and shoots the cleaning solution into the carpet with higher pressure. This breaks up the dirt, bacteria, chemicals and pollens in the carpet. Then, the machine produces a strong vacuum to draw the dirt and pollutants out of your carpet. There is no question that the most effective way to clean carpeting is with a hot-water unit. It's the most powerful cleaning machine on the market, and the only machine that cleans your carpet of dirt, harmful bacteria, fungus, chemicals, pollens, tobacco residue and dust mites.

Some people believe that hot water damages your carpet. This isn't true. By washing and rinsing your carpet with hot water, carpet can be completely cleaned – in the same way that a person who showers and then rinses off the dirt and soap will be much cleaner than the person who only takes a sponge bath.

Dust Mites and Allergies

Dust mites are one of the most common causes of indoor allergies. Often, when people believe they are allergic to dust, they are really allergic to dust mites and their waste particles. Dust mites are microscopic creatures that can be found in carpets, beds, bedding, upholstered furniture and any cloth material. They feed on dead skin cells from humans and pet dander. There can be as many as 100,000 dust mites on a square yard of carpet.

If you or a family member suffers from indoor allergens, reducing dust mites is an important step to get relief.

Obtain a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter. Vacuum daily to remove some dust mites and pet dander.

Steam cleaning carpets on a regular basis considerably lessens the dust mite population and deters population growth. Studies show that the hotter the water, the better success. Studies show that for every 18° increase in temperature over 113°, the water's cleaning ability is doubled.

Other tips for reducing allergy symptoms caused by dust mites are:

- Clean bedding weekly in hot water
- Steam clean mattresses and seal in allergen-proof covers
- Buy a new pillow every six months
- Clean toys and stuff animals on a regular basis
- Freeze stuffed animals and other items that cannot be laundered overnight. Remove and shake outside to remove any dust mite particles.

How Often Should You Clean Your Carpet?

The frequency of recommended carpet cleaning depends upon your specific circumstances. Homes with small children, pets or indoor smokers need to be cleaned more often than homes without. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) offers the following suggested guidelines:

Homes with Smokers	Clean Every 4 Months
Homes with Young Children	Clean Every 6 Months
Homes with Indoor Pets	Clean Every 6 Months
Homes with Children and Pets	Clean Every 4-6 Months
Day Care Centers	Clean Every 2 Weeks
Nursing Homes	Clean Monthly
Office Building	Clean Every 4-6 Months
Restaurants	Clean Monthly
Retail	Clean Every 4-6 Months

You can find a chart of additional EPA guidelines at:

www.tricountycarpetcare.com/epaguidelines.html

Stain Removal Tips

Most carpet spot cleaners don't do a good job maintaining the beauty of your carpet. In fact, some very well-known national brands can damage the color of your carpet and leave a residue that attracts soil.

If you want to keep your carpet looking great in between professional cleanings, you should keep these items on hand: clear dishwashing detergent, household ammonia, white vinegar, citrus solvent (i.e.; Goof-off, Melaleuca's Sol-u-Mel, etc.) and paper towels or plain white absorbent towels.

Household spills normally fall under one of three categories:

1. Water-Based Stains
2. Special Water-Based Stains
3. Greasy, Oil-Based Stains

To clean common spills, identify which category they fall under using the chart on the next page. Then, follow the cleaning instructions on pages 8 - 10 for the category.

It is not unusual for stains to sometimes reappear after spot cleaning. Wicking occurs when a liquid has been spilled on the carpet (usually a large quantity) and cleaning attempts remove only the stain and liquid from the carpet fibers. Liquid still remains in the carpet backing or padding. Through capillary action, the stain can "wick" back up into the carpet and attract soil. These stains are not permanent and typically can be removed by simply repeating the appropriate step-by-step instructions.

Some additional suggestions:

Avoid over wetting the carpet backing during spot cleaning and rinsing. Blotting to remove excess moisture reduces the occurrence of wicking stains.

Use a "wet-vac" to extract liquid from the area if possible. Paper towels placed over the cleaned area and weighted with a colorfast object will help to absorb resurfacing stains. Use of fans to decrease dry time will also help.

Water-Based Stains

Alcohol	Cola	Grape Juice	Soft Drinks
Baby Formula	Cologne	Graphite	Syrup
Beer	Cranberry Juice	Ice Cream	Tomato Juice
Blood	Felt Tip Marker	Jelly	Water Colors
Candy	Food Stains (General)	Latex Paint	Watermelon
Catsup	Fruit Juice	Liquor	Whiskey
Chocolate Milk	Fruit Punch	Milk	Wine
Clay	Furniture Polish (Water-Based)	Soil Spots	Vomit

Special Water-Based Stains

Coffee	Tea	Urine
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Greasy, Oil-Based Stains

Butter	Glue*	Margarine	Peanut Butter
Chocolate	Gravy	Mascara	Rouge
Cooking Oil	Grease (black)	Mayonnaise	Salad Dressing
Cosmetics	Gum*	Nail Polish	Spaghetti
Crayon	Hand Cream	Oil	Wax
Furniture Dye	Ink	Oil Paint	Varnish
Furniture Polish (Oil-Based)	Lipstick	Ointment	

Removing Water-Based Stains:

Step 1

- Use a spoon or dull knife to remove solid materials.
- For large stains, work from the outside of stain to the center to prevent spreading.
- Blot up liquid spills with a white towel or paper towel.
- Mix a solution of ¼ teaspoon of clear hand dishwashing detergent with 1 cup of water. Stir gently.
- Apply detergent solution directly to a white cloth. Dampen the carpet fibers in the stained area with the cloth. Avoid saturating the carpet.
- Wipe gently. Turn cloth frequently. Never rub, scrub or use a brush. This may damage the carpet fibers.
- If necessary, use your fingertips to work the solution to the base of the stain.
- Wet the stained carpet fibers with clear, lukewarm water to rinse.
- Cover the spot with an absorbent white towel or paper towel and apply pressure to blot.
- Repeat the rinsing and blotting procedures until you are sure all traces of the detergent have been removed.
- Change towels or paper towels until carpet dries.
- If stain remains, proceed to Step 2.

Step 2

Note: Do NOT use on coffee, tea or urine stains

- Mix 2 tablespoons of non-bleaching, non-sudsing household ammonia with 1 cup of lukewarm water.
- Apply ammonia solution, rinse and blot as outlined in Step 1.
- Do not dry with paper towels. Proceed to Step 3 to neutralize the ammonia solution.

Step 3

- Mix 1 cup of white vinegar with 2 cups of water.
- Apply vinegar solution as outlined in Step 1.

Removing Special Water-Based Stains (Coffee, Tea and Urine):

Step 1

- For large stains, work from the outside of stain to the center to prevent spreading.
- Blot up liquid spills with a white towel or paper towel.
- Mix a solution of $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of clear hand dishwashing detergent with 1 cup of water. Stir gently.
- Apply detergent solution directly to a white cloth. Dampen the carpet fibers in the stained area with the cloth. Avoid saturating the carpet.
- Wipe gently. Turn cloth frequently. Never rub, scrub or use a brush. This may damage the carpet fibers.
- If necessary, use your fingertips to work the solution to the base of the stain.
- Wet the stained carpet fibers with clear, lukewarm water to rinse.
- Cover the spot with an absorbent white towel or paper towel and apply pressure to blot.
- Repeat the rinsing and blotting procedures until you are sure all traces of the detergent have been removed.
- If the stain is gone, place an absorbent white towel or paper towel over the area cleaned, and weigh towels down with a heavy, color-fast object, such as a weighted plastic wastebasket.
- Change towels or paper towels until carpet dries.
- If stain remains, proceed to Step 2.

Step 2

- Mix 1 cup of white vinegar with 2 cups of water.
- Apply vinegar solution as outlined in Step 1.

Removing Greasy, Oil-Based Stains:

Step 1

- Use a spoon or dull knife to remove solid materials.
- For these stains, use a citrus solvent applied directly to a white cloth. Dampen the carpet fibers in the stained area with the cloth. Avoid saturating the carpet.

Step 2

- For large stains, work from the outside of stain to the center to prevent spreading.
- Blot up liquid spills with a white towel or paper towel.
- Mix a solution of $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of clear hand dishwashing detergent with 1 cup of water. Stir gently.
- Apply detergent solution directly to a white cloth. Dampen the carpet fibers in the stained area with the cloth. Avoid saturating the carpet.
- Wipe gently. Turn cloth frequently. Never rub, scrub or use a brush. This may damage the carpet fibers.
- If necessary, use your fingertips to work the solution to the base of the stain.
- Wet the stained carpet fibers with clear, lukewarm water to rinse.
- Cover the spot with an absorbent white towel or paper towel and apply pressure to blot.
- Repeat the rinsing and blotting procedures until you are sure all traces of the detergent have been removed.
- If the stain is gone, place an absorbent white towel or paper towel over the area cleaned, and weigh towels down with a heavy, color-fast object.
- Change towels or paper towels until carpet dries.
- If stain remains, proceed to Step 3.

Step 3

- Mix 2 tablespoons of non-bleaching, non-sudsing household ammonia with 1 cup of lukewarm water.
- Apply ammonia solution, rinse and blot as outlined in Step 1.
- Do not dry with paper towels. Proceed to Step 4 to neutralize the ammonia solution.

Step 4

- Mix 1 cup of white vinegar with 2 cups of water.
- Apply vinegar solution as outlined in Step 1.

Six Costly Misconceptions About Carpet Cleaning

Misconception #1 – You should wait as long as possible before cleaning your carpet.

No. Dirt is an abrasive – like sandpaper. Every time you step on your carpet, you grind dirt into the carpet fibers. This cuts your carpet, just as if you had used a knife. A dirty carpet will not last as long as a clean carpet. And while vacuuming helps – by itself, it's simply enough. The longer you wait to have your carpet cleaned, the more damage you do to your carpet and the faster it wears out.

Misconception #2 – The only reason to clean carpets is to remove the dirt.

No. As you probably know, outdoor air contains pollens, fungus, bacteria, air pollution, cigarette smoke, car exhaust, and hundreds of other chemicals. When you come into your home, you carry those pollens, bacteria and chemicals in your hair and on your skin, clothing and shoes. Not surprisingly, all those chemicals and toxins wind up in your carpet.

If you have allergies, asthma, emphysema, or other breathing problems, one major source of your problems could be the contaminants in your carpet.

Misconception #3 – One method of carpet cleaning is as good as another.

No. The dry cleaning methods – which are dry foam dry chemicals, and dry compounds – do not rinse your carpet in any way. Instead, they leave a dirty residue. You might say they clean your carpet only halfway. The most effective cleaning method is hot water extraction.

Hot water extraction means a hot water cleaning solution, under high pressure, is forced into your carpet and then sucked out of your carpet. Shaw Industries, the world's largest carpet manufacturer, recommends hot water extraction as the primary method of cleaning carpets.

Carpet cleaners use one of two types of hot water extraction. If they use a large unit that operates from a van or truck outside your facility, it's called a truck-mounted extraction. If they use a small unit that can be brought inside, it's called a portable extraction. Shaw's first choice is the truck-mounted unit – and it recommends the small, portable unit only in areas where the truck-mounted unit won't reach.

The truck-mounted extraction cleans much better because it heats the water to a higher temperature, which breaks up the dirt, bacteria, chemicals and pollens in the carpet. Then, the machine uses the high pressure suction to draw the dirt and chemicals out of your carpet.

Misconception #4 – Having the right equipment is all a company needs to clean your carpets properly.

No. Many companies own hot-water cleaners, but few companies teach their employees how to use them properly. This is why it's important that you choose your carpet cleaner carefully. The best cleaning companies are those that have been certified by the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification, known as the IICRC. Before you choose a carpet cleaner, ask to see written proof of the company's IICRC certification and also the certification of the technician who is going to do the job. If they don't have them, don't use them.

Misconception #5 – The company that offers the lowest price is the company you should hire.

No. We've seen many problems arise from lowest-bid companies. We suggest you never hire a company that quotes the cheapest prices.

The two most common problems are:

1. The price may not be for the services you want performed. The company may be equipped to remove only the dirt from your carpet. However, you may want bacteria, fungus, pollens, dust mites and tobacco residues removed as well.
2. The price you see advertised may not be the price you pay. Many homeowners have learned that the low price they saw advertised only lasted until the carpet cleaner got to their home. Then, they were pressured into paying a lot more for a variety of add-ons. (Some carpet cleaners even break the law by using illegal bait-and-switch tactics.)

Misconception #6 – Any honest carpet cleaning company should be able to give you an exact price quote over the telephone.

I wish this were true, but it isn't. Honest, reputable carpet cleaning companies almost never price carpet cleaning by the room. Instead, carpet cleaning is usually priced by the square foot. So, if you want the exact cost of cleaning your carpet, you need to know the exact square footage of your carpet. To get an accurate measurement, carpet cleaners use a measuring wheel to calculate the exact size of the carpet area.

A professional carpet cleaning company considers three things when quoting the cost of cleaning:

1. The type of carpet – Certain types of carpet are harder to clean than other types
2. The amount of soiling – Carpet that hasn't been cleaned for ten years will take longer to clean than carpet that has been cleaned within the past six months.
3. The amount of furniture that needs to be moved – If you move your own furniture in advance, you'll typically save money.

How to Avoid Four Carpet Cleaning Rip-Offs

Rip-Off #1 – Unbelievably Low Prices

Most people are attracted to low prices. However, some carpet cleaners use price as the bait for their false and misleading advertising. They offer a cheap price and then, once they are in your home, they pressure you into buying “add-ons.” It’s as if you were buying a car and found out that the dealer was charging you extra for the tires and steering wheel. Carpet cleaning is not as cheap as some unethical carpet cleaners would like you to believe.

Rip-Off #2 – Bait and Switch

Dual process carpet cleaning describes the process of shampooing or heavy preconditioning, followed by hot water extraction cleaning. Unfortunately, unethical carpet cleaners often use dual process as a bait-and-switch technique. Here’s how it’s done... First, they “bait” you with a basic cleaning (single process) at an unbelievably low price. Then, when they show up to do the job, they try to “switch” you to a more expensive dual-process cleaning. If you don’t fall for their switch and choose the basic service, you are likely to receive poor workmanship using little or no cleaning products, and they will not guarantee their work.

Rip-Off #3 – Unsupported Claims

“THIS CLEANING METHOD IS THE BEST.” You’ll read this in almost every ad. You’ll hear this from virtually every carpet cleaner. Remember this... The method that’s best for you is the method that achieves your goals. For example, if you want a method that dries quickly, than a method that takes a long time to dry isn’t the best for you. Before you choose a carpet cleaner, identify your objectives. Then, select the method that best reaches those objectives.

Rip-Off #4 – Outdated Beliefs

“HOT WATER DAMAGES YOUR CARPET.” Years ago, many people believed this was true because their carpets were damaged by technicians who didn’t know how to properly clean using hot water. Today, we know this is false. By washing and then rinsing your carpet with hot water, your carpet is thoroughly cleaned – in the same way that a person who showers and rinses off the soap will be much cleaner than a person who only has a sponge bath. Obviously, each cleaner is biased toward his or her own method. And, each method has its own advantages. We suggest you find out what your carpet manufacturer says. Shaw Industries, the world’s largest carpet manufacturer, recommends hot water extraction cleaning with a truck-mounted unit used by firms that are IICRC certified.

Six Mistakes to Avoid When Choosing a Carpet Cleaner

Mistake #1 – Choosing a carpet cleaner based on equipment alone

There is no questioning the fact that your carpet cleaning company needs first-rate equipment. But, the company also needs employees who are skilled at operating that equipment. Many companies use hot water extractors, but very few companies teach their employees how to use them properly. The best way to know that the carpet cleaner's employees have been properly trained is to make sure the cleaner has been certified by the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC). Before you choose a carpet cleaner, ask to see written proof of the company's IICRC certification.

Mistake #2 – Choosing a carpet cleaner based on low price

Low price could be a problem in three ways:

1. Low price can be the bait that attracts your phone call. But, once the cleaner gets into your home, he pressures you into a much more expensive job.
2. Low price can be for single-process cleaning. Rarely does the consumer know what this means and, when told, asks for dual-process cleaning instead. This costs more than the originally stated prices.
3. Low price can mean the carpet cleaner has cheap equipment, which will not effectively clean your carpet.

Mistake #3 – Choosing a carpet cleaner based on a single telephone call

One telephone call cannot give you the information you need to make an educated choice. Instead, invite the person to your home and ask for a written quote. Then, you'll know exactly what the carpet cleaner recommends, and you won't be the victim of high-pressure tactics.

Mistake #4 – Choosing a carpet cleaner who doesn't offer a money-back guarantee

Every carpet cleaning company should be fully accountable for its work. If you aren't please with the service in every way, you shouldn't have to pay for it. Period. Not all cleaners offer a guarantee. Or, if they do, the guarantee may be "limited". Ask the carpet cleaner if there is a money-back guarantee, and then make sure the guarantee is included on the written quote.

Mistake #5 – Choosing a carpet cleaner without getting comments from other clients

Carpet cleaners can say anything about past jobs. Unfortunately, some of what they say may not be true. Make sure you ask for references or read comments from current customers.

Mistake #6 – Choosing a carpet cleaner who isn't certified by the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC)

If your carpet cleaner isn't a close friend, you may not know whether he or she has the knowledge or experience to do a great job cleaning your carpet. If you want to be sure you are hiring a competent professional, make sure he or she is IICRC certified. The carpet cleaner must earn that certification through study, experience and successful completion of formal, written examinations.

If you are thinking about having your carpets cleaned, you should follow these steps to ensure you make the best choice for your specific circumstances. By following these four steps, you will gain all the information you need to make an informed, intelligent decision.

Step #1: Make a commitment to yourself to get your carpets cleaned. The longer they remain dirty, the quicker they will wear out. Plus, the longer you have to breathe all the pollen, fungus and toxins hidden in your carpets.

Step #2: List your objectives. Do you want only the dirt removed, or do you want the bacteria, fungus, chemicals and dust mites removed? Do you want to work with an honest, reputable company, or are you willing to risk working with a company that offers you the lowest price?

Step #3: Ask questions. The way you learn about a company is to ask specific questions and listen carefully to the answers. Here are eight questions to ask a carpet cleaner before he or she is allowed to clean your carpet.

1. What method of carpet cleaning do you recommend?
2. What type of equipment do you use to clean carpet?
3. What will your equipment remove from my carpet?
4. How often should I get my carpets cleaned?
5. What training have you had in cleaning carpet?
6. Are you certified by the IICRC?
7. Do you offer a written guarantee?
8. Can you provide references?

Step #4: Once you are satisfied that you are working with an honest, competent professional, invite him or her to your home and ask for a written quote. A written quote gives you the assurance that you know exactly what your job will cost – with no surprises.