Cleaning to a Higher Standard

By Jim Harris, Sr. and Art Mitchum

Contract cleaning companies that serve ISO-9000 customers have to be a cut above the rest. ISO-9000 companies—such as a facility that manufactures medical catheter tubes that enter the human body—must meet very high standards of operations. Plants must be certified and registered in terms of management and quality initiatives. Procedures governing equipment, products, people, and processes must be not only written down but also scrupulously implemented and monitored. This generally requires a highly participative management style and considerable teamwork among employees. Called "Good Manufacturing Practices" in the industry, this process can be inspected at any time by a certified authority. Obviously, such companies demand a lot from their cleaning companies.

First Step: Customers Need SOPs

Eight years ago, our company, Janitronics, Inc., evolved into the specialty of controlled environmental cleaning in response to customers' needs in health-related fields, where microbial and aseptic cleaning are necessary, such as in hospitals, nursing homes, physicians' offices, HMOs, clinics and similar facilities. Wherever a "clean environment" was essential, we developed a Standard Operating Procedure that was very specific, including:

- What products to be used (these and no others).
- Product dilution rates (to be observed precisely and consistently).
- Frequency of cleaning standards (to suit each type of usage).
- Methods to use (including better equipment).

Our capability as a company developed way beyond the business of cleaning offices and other "normal" environments. We became specialists in "controlled environments" as a supplement to serving our regular cleaning customer base.

Leveraging New Business

The director of facilities of a large manufacturer of catheter tubes for hospitals did not trust an outside service to clean the facility's designated "controlled environments," even though office areas were cleaned by a contract firm. This was an ideal opportunity for us to demonstrate what was possible. We showed the director how we handled the controlled environment of a nearby pharmaceutical company. He was impressed and, frankly, astonished. He had assumed that contract cleaning was limited to rest rooms and offices.

The attractiveness of contract cleaning was immediately evident to the catheter company's director of facilities. His company could focus on its core mission while specialized cleaning would be safely and effectively outsourced to qualified specialists.

When we examined the outmoded equipment and methods that the catheter company was using for cleaning, we knew that our approach could make a measurable impact. There was no doubt that we could do it *better* than the catheter company had been doing it.

Proof in the "Before" and "After"

In its shipping area, the catheter company was experiencing a 10 percent rejection rate of catheter tubes, due to environmental and air quality conditions. This, we were told, was normal for the industry. We considered this a challenge.

By changing procedures and introducing a multi-stage filter backpack vacuum system, we caused the rate of rejection to drop. By our fourth month on the job, instead of a 10 percent rejection rate, the rate was 4 percent –- a startling reduction of 60 percent!

The catheter company had been dust mopping—a process that sends a certain percentage of dust airborne. Also, the treated dust mops emitted VOC's (volatile organic compounds), adding to the environmental degradation. We eliminated dust mopping and replaced it with using backpack vacuum cleaners.

The backpack vacuum system removes far more particulate from the floor and the air. With a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate emission) filter, the system captures at least 99 percent of all particulate, down to .3 of a micron. Electronic particle counters were used to measure airborne particulate before, during, and after cleaning.

Janitronics also tackled the spray booth area, a 4' X 6' X 8' high cubicle where catheters are coated in the final stage of the manufacturing process. The surfaces of the spray booth become totally encrusted with buildup of overspray from the process. We come in once a week—on weekends—to deep-clean and prevent excess buildup. Understanding and accommodating the special needs of the facility helps ensure a good relationship and ongoing business.

Other Special Considerations

The catheter facility is about 110,000 square feet, of which 90 percent is designated a controlled environment. All of the production people must wear gowns, masks, booties, and bonnets. They work mostly at tables, sitting in high chairs, using numerous wheeled carts to carry materials back and forth across the facility.

Members of Janitronics' team of cleaning specialists wear hair nets, beard bags, gowns, and safety glasses; and they wash their hands with anti-bacterial soap before entering the controlled environment. Cleaning products, equipment, and supplies are all properly labeled.

Because indoor air quality must be strictly controlled in these areas, cleaning products and methods must be carefully selected. Hand wipes and flat mops that utilize micro fiber technology are used for their effectiveness and non-linting attributes Synthetic lint-free (nylon) mops are also mandatory. Only pH-neutral cleaning products are used, since inappropriate cleaning chemicals could produce vapors corrosive to delicate equipment.

The catheter company's chemist must approve all cleaning solutions after reviewing MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheets).

Disinfectants include virucides and germicides, used largely for preventive maintenance. Dilutions must be precise to ensure effectiveness and to prevent environmental contamination and surface damage. Anything entering the environment must be wiped down and treated with a quat ammonium or phenolic disinfectant that kills blood-borne pathogens and other harmful microbes.

All paper items inside the controlled environment must be wrapped in plastic to avoid contaminating catheters.

Vacuum cleaners must have excellent filtration, and allow for maneuverability around chair and table legs, into corners and under carts.

HEPA-filtered portable backpack vacs meet this need. The backpack's lightweight wand and head get into areas inaccessible to many other vacuums.

Long-term Implications

Cleaning controlled environments serves a critical purpose for customers. ISO-9000 companies are willing to pay more than for "normal" cleaning, of course, but cleaning contractors must deliver. These customers expect continual improvement. We're always trying to outperform ourselves. In fact, our own corporate mission at Janitronics explicitly aims high: "Customer *Delight—Beyond* Satisfaction." Focusing on quality, our corporate values as a service company are aligned with the values of the catheter manufacturer. This bond—and high performance—promises long-term mutual respect and many renewed cleaning contracts.

Advice

Many cleaning contractors approach their markets with a uni-dimensional strategy based on price cutting. We come from a different school. First, clearly identify customers' requirements; then carefully identify how best to service the account; then let the numbers fall where they may and share the results with the prospect. Be sure to have superior communicators on your staff to carry on an open dialog. When customers thoroughly understand how the numbers have been calculated, why certain methods and products are better, and what it means in the long-run savings to have the cleaning performed properly, most are willing to negotiate a fair price. Walking with them through the estimates of time, dollars, people, equipment, and products builds a relationship of mutual understanding and trust—the best basis for a long-term relationship.

With specialty cleaning, we find that contracts covering three to five years work much better than one-year contracts because of the initial investment in equipment and skilled higher-level personnel. We even build in an annual escalation clause to cover increasing costs "if needed." Often, because of efficiencies, we elect *not* to invoke the increase. Longer contracts also allow all parties to write off certain investment costs for equipment. They also produce more satisfying and career-focused opportunities for employees. All in all, longer contracts yield greater stability of work flow and predictability of cash flow. We recommend reviewing results quarterly with the customer to mutually identify where there is room for more improvement. This helps underscore the true nature of the partnership, with both parties benefiting.

On the other side, our advice to ISO 9000 companies is to qualify the cleaning contractor thoroughly. That is, ask to see a solid track record of performance, and ask to call upon and visit a current customer *on your own.*

Also, visit the home office of the prospective contractor to gauge the firm's culture. For example, does the contractor have a training room for onsite teaching and upgrading of employee's skills? Ask for bank or CPA references to check overall financial stability.

Building long-term customer relations is very important. A scrupulous approach to serving the customer's needs and fair compensation for that diligence and skill, produces a win-win and a lasting relationship that's worth the effort.

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<u>About the authors:</u>
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Additional Information about ISO 9000

The Geneva-based International Organization for Standardization published the ISO 9000 series of standards for quality assurance in 1987 to provide guidelines for consistent quality practices across international borders. "ISO" is derived from the Greek word "isos," meaning equal. ISO 9000 aims to establish a level, or equal, playing field of quality assurance from company to company, country to country. The ISO 9000 series provides general quality management and quality assurance guidelines as well as quality system models that can be used by any type or size company anywhere in the world...

Many of the clauses in ISO 9000 focus on the relationship between the supplier and the customer. ISO registration helps suppliers demonstrate their capabilities to meet quality requirements, while helping purchasers obtain a higher degree of confidence that products and services delivered can continually meet their requirements. In the series, the specific standards break down as follows:

ISO 9001 -- used when conformance to specified requirements is to be assured by the supplier during design, development, production, installation and servicing.

ISO 9002 -- used when conformance to specified requirements is to be assured by the supplier during production, installation and servicing.

ISO 9003 -- used when conformance to specified requirements is to be assured by the supplier solely at final inspection and test.

More than 80 countries have adopted ISO 9000 as national standards. Some countries, most notably those in the European Union, have made ISO 9000 compliance a mandatory part of conformity assessment schemes for certain regulated products. In addition, ISO 9000 is increasingly becoming a factor in military and government contracts. For example, prominent organizations like the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) now require suppliers to be ISO 9000 compliant.

Because ISO 9000 provides basic system management guidelines and a framework for continuous improvement, ISO 9000 is also being used as a basis for new system requirements, such as and .

The many factors driving ISO 9000 registration -- and the benefits of

registration -- have propelled the number of registration certificates issued worldwide. As the leading U.S.-headquartered ISO 9000 registrar, UL registered more than 1,800

firms since 1989. Total registrations in the United States will soon reach the 8,500 mark at a rate of some 3,000 new registrations a year. And, worldwide, there are now nearly 300,000 ISO 9000 registrations. The number of registrations has in fact nearly quadrupled over the past few years.