

OPL 101

Finding hidden efficiencies to improve your laundry operation

BY BILL BROOKS

Managing an on-premises laundry (OPL) operation means always being on the lookout for hidden efficiencies and ways to improve production, whether it's through labor, utilities, water usage, laundry room design or technology.

If you're building or remodeling a laundry room, or you're wondering how to improve efficiency and decrease the costs associated with your current laundry operation, here are perspectives from three distributors serving the OPL industry on factors to consider:

Q How can OPL managers use technology to improve efficiency and increase production?

Ryan Lucken, operations manager, Washington Automated: OPL managers who don't utilize technology to understand their laundry operation may not realize they are working blindly. Technological advancements allow you to receive daily, weekly and yearly reports via e-mail, detailing how your laundry operation is doing, which can help you find and implement efficiencies.

For example, the right technology will be able to provide information on a machine's idle time—the delay between when the dryer stops and when it's opened to remove clothing—as well as in-depth data about programming details to ensure the right cycles are being chosen by your staff for optimal production. This information can then be utilized to make any necessary adjustments to improve efficiency and increase production.

Embracing technology is a great starting point; however, it's not enough to simply purchase machines with advanced technology and expect results. Learning how to use the technology and analyze the data it provides will help give you a behind-the-scenes look at your operation, establish benchmarks and find ways to improve it.

Craig Dakauskas, vice president, Commercial and Coin Laundry Equipment Co.: Technology makes the whole laundry process easier and more efficient, allowing OPL managers to successfully manage a laundry operation without being physically present. The latest technology is cloud-based, so this information can be accessed at any time from anywhere in the world with an Internet connection. Information can be analyzed quickly with easy-to-read reports, which enables you to find efficiencies, compare production and set benchmarks that will help improve production.

Tom Schwartz, sales engineer, Washburn Machinery: Technology can help OPL managers keep track of maintenance schedules for their equipment, as well as diagnose problems. You can sign up to receive text messages or e-mails as reminders to check equipment, such as cleaning out lint screens or greasing the bearings, which is especially important for high-speed machines. You can also be alerted when a load is complete, as well as

when a washer or dryer may need maintenance, which is more efficient and convenient than keeping a manual maintenance log.

When machines do inevitably need fixing, advanced diagnostics can quickly determine what is wrong and display an error code, the cycle it occurred during, as well as how to repair it. All of these things reduce equipment and labor downtime.

Q What can OPL managers do to reduce labor costs?

Lucken: As previously mentioned, the best thing OPL managers can do to reduce labor costs is embrace new technology and make sure all equipment is up-to-date with the latest programming and reporting capabilities. As an OPL manager, your goal should be to utilize the technology and programming options on your machines so that they can manage themselves as much as possible, reducing the amount of work and monitoring you and your housekeeping staff have to do.

The technology that is featured on modern equipment includes faster extraction speeds, moisture-sensing drying and reports that monitor production, all of which can allow you to increase the amount of loads you complete in a day and/or be able to send housekeeping staff home earlier, cutting down on labor costs.

Dakauskas: If their machines are outdated, OPL managers can reduce labor costs by investing in new equipment. This may cost a bit more upfront, but it will pay off in a short time when you factor in the labor and utility savings new machines provide, as well as linen preservation. You can work with your distributor to determine the right equipment mix for your operation.

Another way to reduce labor costs is to analyze your laundry operation's productivity and only schedule staff when necessary, which is when laundry is coming in and going out. For example, OPL managers can start a load of laundry first thing in the morning and schedule staff to start working once that first load is complete; this eliminates idle time during the first load when employees don't have any work to do yet.

Q What changes in laundry room design and layout can OPL managers make to maximize production?

Dakauskas: An on-premises laundry room should be organized to optimize throughput. Personally, I would recommend the flow of an ideal laundry room to be designed as follows: A washer is the first thing a housekeeping employee sees and can access upon walking into a laundry room with a laundry bin. He or she can then move on to the dryer, then an ironing



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table and folding table if applicable. Finally, on the way out, there should be room to store clean linens and laundry bins. This laundry room layout can help make the jobs of housekeeping staff easier and ensure maximum throughput, which can in turn cut down on labor costs.

Schwartz: Laundry room design should be set up to flow from the "dirty" side of the room (where the unwashed linens are) to a clean side. On the clean side should be laundry carts and tables designated only for clean linens. OPL managers should also aim to ensure that their housekeeping staff can move from machine to machine easily. You can help maximize throughput by ensuring that washers and dryers are close enough to each other that your staff doesn't have to walk far to transfer linens but far enough away that they still have room to maneuver.

Q What are some ways that OPL managers can reduce utility costs?

Lucken: Aside from utilizing technology to ensure all programming is fixed to the most efficient settings, utility cost reduction can be found in new, quality equipment. Most machines have specific "Eco" cycles that reduce water and energy usage. Some washers have rinse cycles that spray through the linens like a shower—instead of a washer that fills up like a bath—which can save as much as 39% in water use and leave behind 22% less chemical residue on linens. High-speed extractors, with a G-force exceeding 300, help reduce drying time by extracting more water in the washer before linens are even placed in the dryer. This extraction speed actually reduces energy usage.

Dakauskas: Dryers with moisture-sensing technology greatly reduce drying time by automatically shutting the machine off when linens get to a certain temperature and level of dryness. This technology can cut a dry cycle by around 30%. We've even seen some cycles decrease from 40 minutes to 19 minutes. This drying technology eliminates operator error and running a dryer longer than is necessary, cutting down on energy usage.

Q What can OPL managers do to more efficiently clean linens while preserving linen life?

Lucken: The No. 1 thing OPL managers

can do to preserve linen life is ensure they are using dryers with moisture-sensing technology that shuts the machine off when linens are dry. Extending linen life comes down to eliminating over-drying, which is caused by keeping linens in a hot dryer for longer than is necessary. Scorching linens will cause OPL managers to have to buy new linens more frequently.

One way to determine if your dryers are overdrying your linen is to look at how much lint is produced during each cycle; excessive lint is a sign of overdrying.

Dakauskas: In addition to utilizing moisture-sensing dryers, there is technology out there that allows you customize programming and cycles to match specific linen types, as well as to use less heat (in both washer and dryer) on specific cycles. The longer you dry linens, the rougher they get. You can extend linen life by reducing the amount of heat they're exposed to.

Schwartz: The right washer will clean linens quickly while maximizing the little time they do spend inside with a spray rinse. A washer-extractor sprays your linens clean, instead of soaking them in a tub of water, which helps preserve linen life by better removing chemicals and substances (e.g., bleach, detergent, soil) that can deteriorate linen. Different loads require different amounts of chemicals for the optimal wash, and washing different linen types together can have adverse effects. Avoid washing a load that's either too large or too small; this can affect the amount of chemicals linens are exposed to and either not clean them completely or damage them.

Managing an on-premises laundry operation often means looking for ways to improve efficiency and maximize production without having to put in a significant amount of additional work. This can be done by embracing technology and analyzing labor processes, machine programming, laundry room layout and equipment mix; however, you can't improve what you can't measure, so ensuring you have the capabilities to analyze your operation and set benchmarks is crucial.

At the end of the day, the distributors agreed that having the right equipment can save time and money while increasing the production of a laundry operation. **ALN**



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