

OPL 101

# Keeping linens off life support

Steps healthcare on-premises laundry facilities can take to extend linen life

BY BILL BROOKS

RIPON, Wis. — Extending linen quality and life is important for every on-premises laundry (OPL) facility, but the healthcare industry must do so while meeting its own unique challenges.

At any given time, hospitals, long-term care facilities and short-term acute care facilities will host hundreds of patients and residents, all with different illnesses and conditions. Throughout the day, linens will be taken from a patient's bed, processed and put on another patient's bed, and it is vital that healthcare facilities properly wash and dry their linens to maintain patient safety and stay compliant with sanitation guidelines, as well as improve throughput and processing times.

Unfortunately, due to tight budgets and understaffed facilities, linen care can sometimes take a back seat to saving a dollar in the short-term.

What is important for facility managers to understand, however, is a well-run laundry operation can not only prevent spreading of illness, but also produce savings in the form of utilities, labor and linen replacement costs.

REM Company Inc., a certified UniMac® laundry equipment distributor that operates in Kentucky and Tennessee, serves more than 1,000 healthcare accounts and manages contract laundry services for nursing homes across the United States from its Versailles, Ky., home office.

Given the company's vast experience in the healthcare industry, REM Vice President Mark Moore knows just how big a role linens play in a facility's day-to-day operation.

"Linen quality is extremely important in the healthcare setting because it's the one thing that comes in contact with the staff and patients every day," Moore says. "If you have issues with your linen, that can be detrimental to the care of the patient and linen itself."

## MAJOR PLAYERS IN SHORTENING LINEN LIFE

Linens, just like any piece of clothing, will deteriorate over time when laundered. However, there are several contributors that can cause linens to deteriorate more quickly and lead to the need for replacement: more use, inadequate rinsing, over-drying and improper execution.

"Today, the average linen produced per patient per day is higher than it was 10 years ago," Moore says. "Insurance companies are shifting patients quicker from the hospital to nursing or short-term care settings. When this happens sooner, the patient is typically in worse condition, meaning more soiled linens. Accounts now need 20 to 30% more linen out of the same footprint."

One of the first places staff look to improve processing times is often focused on shorter cycle times; however, the quality of the wash and rinse process must not suffer. By reducing rinse time on machines, there will be a good amount of residual chemicals left on the linen. Drying of the linen will not remove the wash chemistry, and if a high-pH residual chemistry remains, it can be detrimental to patient care.

**"IF YOU HAVE ISSUES WITH YOUR LINEN, THAT CAN BE DETRIMENTAL TO THE CARE OF THE PATIENT AND LINEN ITSELF."**

—MARK MOORE  
REM COMPANY INC.

Moore says, "When you put a linen in contact with the patient, any moisture—sweat or bodily fluids—will activate the residual chemistry and get on the patient. A linen with a pH of 8 or higher can cause burns to the skin."

A proper rinse cycle and process are needed to assure proper pH levels are reached to avoid the complications of discomfort and even bedsores that can be caused by high residual pH in linens.

In addition to causing potential harm to patients, when chemicals are present during the drying process, the heat will cause the linens to yellow or gray over time and will destroy the linen fibers.

Additionally, dryers in healthcare settings, specifically nursing homes, are often a bottleneck.

"The reason being is staff over-dry the linens," Moore explains. "We have seen staff put a load in and set the timer for 45 minutes. The problem is, the load is typically done in 30 minutes, and the extra 15 minutes lead to severe over-drying."

The reasons for staff over-drying the linens vary, from improper training to not wanting management to walk in and see fresh linens sitting in the dryer instead of being folded and put back into rotation.

Proper training of staff is crucial to extend linen quality and life. If a facility is using older equipment with manual controls, staff will need to pay special attention to the selected settings on dryers and cycles on washers.

For tumble dryers, specifically, operators will need to select the temperature setting, heat time and cool-down time for each cycle.

This becomes especially tricky when several different types of linens are laundered throughout the day. Bed sheets, bed pads and towels all dry at different rates, so staff should switch the settings for each load. Constantly changing these settings increases the chances of a wrong cycle being selected, which can have negative effects not only on linen life, but throughput and utility costs as well.

## BRINGING LINENS BACK TO LIFE

While these circumstances may be present in healthcare laundries, there are ways in which managers can take control of their operations and bring a higher quality of life to linens.

One of the quickest ways to improve an operation is contacting a certified laundry equipment distributor. Distributors can not only perform regular maintenance and repairs on aging equipment, but they can also assist healthcare facilities in identifying laundry process improvements, including the correct equipment mix and new technology that can improve linen life.

If an operation is using the same equipment they were 10 years ago, before the amount of soiled linens produced per patient increased as indicated by Moore, they are not going to be able to keep up with appropriate benchmarks.

Facilities can confirm this by looking at the linen par. Moore explains, "The norm for healthcare facilities is three par, however that is rarely the case when old equipment is being used, especially in a nursing setting. It's lucky if they have 1.5 par. Bed pads will be taken off in the morning, processed and then used again in the afternoon. This is another reason staff may look to short-cycle the machines."

To reduce residual wash chemistry on linens, Moore suggests looking into washer-extractors that feature spray-rinse technology.

"By upgrading just one machine with

this technology, a facility can decrease the presence of residual wash chemistry by 22%," he says.

Unlike bath rinses, which only dilute wash chemistry, spray-rinse technology pulls chemicals through the load and down the drain, instead of being left on the linen. In addition to the improved wash quality, facilities will experience as much as 39% less water consumption than competitor brands and decreased cycle rinse times by up to 12%.

To show one customer just how much time and money they were wasting by using outdated dryers and inappropriate wash settings, REM asked staff to accumulate lint out of the dryers for one week. In that short period of time, the account had enough lint to fill a large trash can.

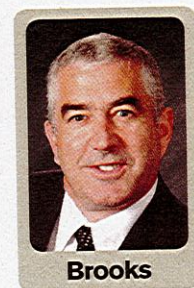
REM then replaced the old dryers with new ones featuring over-dry prevention technology and set the washers to a more appropriate rinse. The team accumulated lint for another week and it was less than half of what was gathered before.

Over-dry prevention technology automatically stops the tumble dryer at the exact moment the ideal dryness level is reached. Implementing such technology can save hundreds and even thousands of dollars on utilities and labor costs, as well as help extend the life of the linens, as they will experience 31% less fiber loss.

Even if new equipment is not in a property's budget, they should still consider making an appointment for a distributor to visit the facility, monitor their activity and provide recommendations on how to better improve the operation.

"If we were to come out to an account for eight hours, it's safe to say we could easily save them two to three times the cost of our visit," Moore says.

As pressure to process linens faster and with better results continues, laundry may seem like a never-ending battle in the healthcare industry, but when laundry managers take a step back, assess their operation and work with their distributor, they can bring new life to their linens and overall laundry process. **ALN**



Bill Brooks is North American sales manager for UniMac®, a provider of on-premises laundry equipment. To learn more about UniMac, visit [www.unimac.com/opl101](http://www.unimac.com/opl101) or call 800-587-5458.

## Chutes

Continued from Page 4

not fit-testing employees' respirators, blocked access to electrical panels and unsecured compressed gas cylinders. New hazards involve lack of an emergency eyewash station, an eyewash station installed immediately below energized light

switches and inadequate insulation on a power cord, according to OSHA.

These conditions led OSHA to cite U.S. Chutes on May 9, 2016, for 10 instances of failing to abate previously cited hazards, as well as three repeat and three serious violations of workplace safety and health standards.

Headquartered in Boca Raton, Fla., U.S. Chutes had 15 business days from receipt of its failure to

abate notices and citations and proposed penalties to comply, meet with OSHA's area director or contest the findings before the independent Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission.

U.S. Chutes also failed to pay the \$94,428 in fines assessed in January 2015 and has not responded to demand letters from OSHA. The Debt Collection Accountability Team in OSHA's Office of Financial Management has now referred the

debt to the U.S. Department of the Treasury for collection.

American Laundry News made an attempt to contact U.S. Chutes, but did not receive a reply as of press time.

To ask questions, obtain compliance assistance, file a complaint, or report amputations, eye loss, workplace hospitalizations, fatalities or situations posing imminent danger to workers, the public should call OSHA's toll-free

hotline at 800-321-OSHA (6742) or the agency's Hartford office at 860-240-3152.

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, employers are responsible for providing safe and healthful workplaces for their employees. OSHA's role is to ensure these conditions for America's working men and women by setting and enforcing standards, and providing training, education and assistance. **ALN**