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What Does Your Cart Say About Your Business?

By Lisa Ridgely, Deputy Editor of Contracting Profits

Janitorial carts are the closest thing, other than the janitor's closet, that janitors have to a workspace — and they're the most visible piece of equipment that most building occupants will see. Carts have to provide adequate storage for the supplies needed to stock restrooms and other areas, but they also have to hold chemical bottles, water buckets, cleaning tools such as mops and microfiber cloths, and waste and recycling. "A housekeeping cart is both the workstation, the office and the assembly line and it has a huge impact on overall productivity of the housekeeper," says Larry Garrone, senior brand manager of healthcare/environmental services for *Sodexo, Inc.*, Gaithersburg, Md. Carts should be big enough to hold everything necessary for a worker to do his or her job without having to make unnecessary trips to the janitor's closet to restock items, yet maneuverable for workers of any size. And since they're often in plain sight in hallways and doorways, carts can't be an eyesore, either.

Perception is reality

Since carts are so visible to the public, janitors should be trained to keep them tidy. Without question, a messy cart is going to produce negative perception that extends to the janitor and the cleaning itself, then to the BSC and the industry as a whole. If (occupants) walk in and see a well-stocked maid cart that looks new, they assume that extrapolates itself out to other parts of your business. So that's what we try to do — we want to promote professionalism for our organization in particular and the industry in general. We tell our employees, if we can't keep our janitor's closet or our cart clean, how can we clean a facility?

For most building service contractors, carts are utilized as part of an overall cleaning program or process. "If you're following procedures and have some type of reference point, it is very difficult for the carts to start looking messy," Garrone says. "So having standard carts set up along with a cart that is designed to hold all these things — those two in combination will give you that organized professional look." Carts have evolved to fit any job and any preference, with accessories that can be added to increase aesthetic appeal, storage capacity, organizational ability or security. Carts can be customized to the type of facilities in which they're used, with different colors, laminates and materials. Appearance is significant, but productivity and safety are at the heart of a cart's purpose and role in a janitorial program.

Worker productivity

BSCs want to increase efficiencies in any way possible, and carts play an integral part when it comes to the productivity of workers. "Everything in our business is about time," Klein says. "The less time it takes, the more money you make. So, if I can get something done in a short



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amount of time, then I make a little more money than if they have to walk back and get toilet paper or paper towel from a supply closet.”

Carts are built to be flexible and dense with all of the products a janitor needs to clean and disinfect, as well as stock. A company like Sodexo, which trains its workers on a very specific, multiple-step cleaning process, seeks out carts that give janitors the ability to efficiently stock a cart so that necessary tools and supplies are readily available and accessible for cleaning. “A housekeeper has a job flow and in that job flow, they’re cleaning offices, restrooms, and different utility rooms, and so in those activities there’s certain tools and supplies that they need in a certain order,” Garrone says.

Ensuring that janitors have the proper tools on hand in a way that helps them present a safe and pleasant environment for occupants is critical, he adds. A-1 has used bucketless mops for years, and a new cart the company is using now allows a two-gallon solution tank to be carried on the cart with a hose that connects to microfiber flat mops. “So we can use a flat mop right there, instead of our folks having to refill their smaller bottles either by carrying around quart bottles and filling up the tanks on the bucketless mops or going back to janitors closet to refill it,” Thompson says. The new carts also offer opportunity to stock more items on carts, Thompson says, including a biohazard kit with personal protective equipment for janitorial workers. Something like that could be critical in a long-term care facility, where diseases and infections such as c-diff and MRSA abound.

Occupant safety

Worker safety is always a concern for BSCs, but when it comes to janitorial carts, the safety of other building occupants, such as children in schools, or the handicapped or mentally ill in medical facilities, is a primary concern as well. “We need to be able to secure our supplies when our cart is left unattended.” Supplies can be secured in locking compartments. Some carts require chemicals to be moved into compartments in another location, while others allow janitors to lock them where they are on top of the cart. Another aspect of occupant safety is the cleanliness of the carts themselves. As they are so mobile, they can carry microorganisms from one room to the next — and in a hospital or other medical facility, they have the potential to be the carriers of disease. Carts should be cleaned and disinfected daily, as well as spot cleaned when necessary.

BSCs seem to be impressed by the advancements in janitorial carts, and how they help janitors be more efficient while looking as professional as possible. “If you’re looking for that one cart that fits your needs, there is a solution out there,” Garrone says. “I think the trend is to have more flexibility, more customization and it gives operators a lot more leeway as things change.”
