



Getting into Healthcare: Operational Challenges

Understanding HLAC accreditation, safety and design needs can ease the transition

By Jim Buchbinder

In recent years, many industrial launderers and restaurant/hospitality linen providers have explored the possibility of entering the healthcare laundry market. In the past, the absence of an accrediting agency for healthcare laundries meant that some facilities operated in a manner that didn't promote an appropriate standard of cleanliness for the products that they processed.

That, in turn, could raise concerns for the health and safety of the individuals employed at these facilities.

To address these concerns, TRSA led the creation of an accredi-

ing agency, the Healthcare Laundry Accreditation Council (HLAC) that allows laundry operators to voluntarily adopt all the practices that would result in products that are processed to the highest of standards, while also promoting the health and safety of their employees. The HLAC has created standards for the construction and operation of healthcare facilities as well. The agency provides accreditation to those facilities that are in compliance. Reino Linen, Gibsonburg, OH, was the first company accredited by HLAC in April 2006. Since then, 35 other laundries have received accreditation and over 30 more have applied for accreditation. ☛

Maximizing safety, efficiency, product quality and space utilization is a complex task—especially when you're also minimizing labor, utilities usage and capital investment. It's important that you or your management staff gain expertise in all of these areas, or that you utilize professional design consultants to ensure the best use of your resources when building or renovating your facility.

Without mandatory requirements—other than ensuring compliance with OSHA, EPA or other federal, state or local regulations, why would an operator invest the time and effort necessary to attain voluntary accreditation?

1. Increased customer confidence. Because healthcare facilities are closely regulated, there's an increased awareness of the potential to lose accreditation by using a substandard laundry provider.

2. Negligence leads to regulations. LaundryESP® is a great success story. Because the combined industry took responsibility for wastewater improvement, voluntary compliance prevented the imposition of more federal regulations. Voluntary compliance through HLAC can do the same for the healthcare laundry segment.

3. Employee health and safety is a good business practice. Refusing to make the investment in a safe workplace will cost an operator in workers' compensation expenses, lost days and employee morale. OSHA violations can take even more.

There are obviously many more good reasons to design and build a facility that meets or exceeds voluntary accreditation standards, but for now let's look at three major design considerations to accomplish this:

1. Separation of soil from clean. It is an HLAC requirement to provide a physical separation in on premise healthcare laundry facilities (See section 2.2.1). A physical barrier is conducive to providing positive air pressure on the clean side of the facility. AIA (American Institute of Architects' standards call for a minimum of 10 air changes per hour on the soil side and two air changes per hour on the clean side for an on premise healthcare laundry facility. Operators should consider designing to a more stringent standard for the reasons stated above. In the case of off premise laundries, separation can be maintained by airflow only.

2. Employee Protective Measures. Laundry chemicals can be considered corrosive and/or combustible when in their pure form. Therefore, it's a requirement to have eyewash and shower stations near chemical stations. HLAC requires that eyewash stations be placed within 10 seconds from any hazard, including contact with bloodborne pathogens. Eye wash stations should be placed in the

chemical storage area, at the point of injection into laundry equipment, in the soil room and boiler room. A recent revision requires both hot and cold potable water with an anti-scalding valve. Another protective measure that's important to consider and possibly implement is a "decontamination room" (not required) where the removal of all protective gowns, gloves and other apparel is required when leaving the soil room. It is also necessary to place hand-washing or hand-sanitizing stations in this area. This practice is necessary for infection control and employee safety purposes. Containers and signage should be placed anywhere there is movement between the two areas.

3. Other Safety Design Considerations. A healthcare laundry, like any laundry, has areas where safety hazards could arise. Should this happen in your plant, you must address them as quickly as possible. Areas of potential concern include overhead slings and hoists, automated shuttles, ironers and others. Signage is important, along with regular training regarding such hazards. Additionally, clearly marked aisles are crucial in the event of an evacuation. In a healthcare laundry, special consideration should be given to planning aisle ways, because there's a need to minimize crossover between soil and clean areas of the facility.

There are many more design considerations that are important when designing a healthcare facility. Wastewater, boiler and steam lines, water heating and heat recovery, product flow from the washroom through ironers and folders, storage and picking of clean product all require careful planning.

Maximizing safety, efficiency, product quality and space utilization is a complex task—especially when you're also minimizing labor, utilities usage and capital investment. It's important that you or your management staff gain expertise in all of these areas, or that you utilize professional design consultants to ensure the best use of your resources when building or renovating your facility. TR



**ACCREDITED
LAUNDRY**



Jim Buchbinder is vice president/business development for Turn-Key Industrial Engineering Services, Charlottesville, VA. Turn-Key has been involved in several successful healthcare facility planning projects. Contact him at 434/227-2613 or jbuchbinder@turnkeyengineering.com.