

Prep Room Maintenance

Preventative maintenance on a regular schedule is an often neglected function, not only in our homes, but in our businesses. By creating a plan for routine maintenance and executing it faithfully, funeral home directors can realize a cost savings in efficiency and lessen the possibility of unexpected equipment failure.

This article focuses on the fixed items within the preparation room. In addition to air systems, foot-end equipment, plumbing equipment and safety devices it also addresses built-in cabinetry, flooring, wall surfaces and light fixtures. Other “non-fixed” items, such as the embalming machines, also need to be monitored.

Air Systems

In our experience, top-of-the-list on a preventative maintenance plan should be the proper care and upkeep of the facility’s heating, ventilating and air conditioning system. Studies have shown that inadequate air quality can expose the embalmer to a range of health hazards. A poorly maintained air system can result in operational loss and render an otherwise compliant airstream ineffective and noncompliant.

As the Family Handyman website (www.familyhandyman.com) states, “Few routine chores will pay off more handsomely, both in comfort and in dollars saved, than a simple air-condi-

tioner cleaning. You’ll also prolong the life of your air conditioner.” We couldn’t agree more.

To keep the ventilating system in your prep room in good working order, we recommend that the air filters on your unit be changed regularly, as specified by the manufacturer. Check with the manufacturer of your unit for the replacement filters you will require. DST supplies filters for all of its OSHA compliant HVAC units. And remember, it is important to note that the HVAC system serving your preparation room be completely separate from the rest of the facility.

Checking or changing air filters on a six-month cycle is a common expectation. In addition to filter exchanges, the exterior condenser and interior cooling coil should be cleaned once a year. It may be prudent to engage a professional to tend to these important needs. Or, for the reader who is a do-it-yourselfer, we refer you again to the Family Handyman website, which we find to be a good source for step-by-step cleaning procedures. Remember to check the manufacturer’s recom-

mendations before commencing with third-party procedures.

Regulatory Responsibilities for Safety Equipment

The American National Standards Institute standard ANSI Z358.1-2009 includes minimum performance, testing, installation, maintenance and training specifications for equipment and systems for emergency treatment of the eyes or body of a person who has been exposed to injurious materials. In the context of prep rooms, embalmers are to be protected.

Eyewash and Overhead Drench Shower

In today’s embalming rooms, ANSI requirements mean that a properly installed and operating eyewash and overhead drench shower be installed in the prep room. These standards exist for the protection of the embalmer and staff, and while we may sometimes think they are overbearing, the reality is that they are of the utmost importance.

We recognize that even the most diligent of funeral directors may be unaware of safety equipment maintenance requirements. While a safety fixture out of the box may be certified to meet the ANSI standard, once installed, it is important to make sure all necessary requirements of the standard are being met, as emergency fixtures may have been tampered with or accidentally damaged over time and lose functionality.

ANSI specifically requires that eyewash and showers be activated at least weekly. The regulation for eyewashes can be found in Section 5.5.2 of the standard; for showers, Section 4.6.2. In addition, the

emergency equipment must be inspected annually for compliance with standard: Section 5.5.5. for eyewash and Section 4.6.5 for showers.

During the weekly test, the plumbed units should be activated long enough to be sure flushing fluid is provided. The activation helps to 1) ensure sedimentation is cleared, which may otherwise clog the supply lines; and 2) flush stagnant water from plumbed fixtures, thereby reducing the

chance of microbial hazards.

Consistent activation makes the difference between meeting minimum requirements for installed products, and having emergency equipment that is truly functional and provides the best performance in the event of an emergency. An inspection log noting weekly activation near each emergency fixture is a helpful tool to facilitate this process. This log may also serve as important documen-

tation during an inspection.

Cross Connection Prevention

Next, let's address the maintenance of a common cross-connect prevention installation. Funeral homes are required to have dedicated backflow prevention designed to protect potable



water supplies within the preparation room in accordance with national plumbing codes and the local water authority. The requirements apply to both the hot and cold water lines. While your system installation may vary, we will discuss compliance achieved by means of reduced pressure zone assemblies. With a reduced pressure zone assembly design, backflow prevention devices for the preparation room item are

located and installed specifically to isolate the unit from the rest of the facility. This protection is independent and separate from the main building connection to the municipal water supply.

To properly maintain a reduced pressure zone assembly, it is important that the device be inspected monthly for any discharge from the relief valves. This inspection will provide a visual indication of

need for cleaning or repair of check valves. Testing for proper operation of the device should be made periodically in compliance with local codes, but at least once a year, depending upon system conditions. All local building departments we are aware of require an annual inspection. Again, keeping a log of the inspections could prove invaluable. Backflow violations are often cited in reports by state inspectors as the devices are generally not in plain sight and therefore assumed to be nonexistent.

Producing a test log is a good way to show due diligence and demonstrate a positive impression with the inspector. In terms of specific maintenance, should your backflow devices indicate service needs, your manufacturer or supplier will offer relief valve service kits. However, we do recommend having the service provided by a licensed master plumber.

Foot-end Products

Other products in the embalming room that require attention are foot-end products, such as water control units, waste removal systems and sink systems. Let's discuss these items as each product in your facility should have cleaning and maintenance instructions included with its installation. If you do not have the necessary information on file, we urge you to contact the manufacturer or supplier for recommended procedures.

Water Control Units

Water control units typically provide hydro-aspiration, water to the table and water for machine fill. The water table and machine fill elements are usually operated by lever handles that mix hot and cold water. Should your water run slow, or not turn all the way off, you will need to perform minor maintenance. The control handles typically have small springs and rubber cup washers within their base. These springs and washers can wear out, clog or

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otherwise malfunction resulting in a water drip or blockage. Identify the brand of your device and obtain the needed replacement kit from a local hardware store or approved distributor for your particular device. You need only turn off the water supply, remove the handle (usually with a small Allen wrench) and replace the springs and washers. At the same time clear out any debris that may be in the chamber. This five-minute process can often solve water drip or slow-running water problems.

A second place to check for slow-running water is at the faucet outlet, which usually has a small screen inside a removable fitting. Unscrew the fitting and clear out the debris, such as calcium buildup, which may be trapped in the screen and slowing the water flow.

Maintaining your hydro-aspirator is a two-step process to be performed after each procedure. First, back-flush your device. Back-flushing will

cause water to flow out of the hose and trocar, so place it in a drain first. Back-flushing should clear any debris out of the system. Second, aspirate a 5-gallon bucket of water mixed with disinfectant. When finished, carefully store the trocar in solution.

Waste Removal Systems

Preparation room waste removal systems generally fall into three types. First there is the open sink bowl, either in stainless steel or vitreous china. While we no longer recommend open sink bowls due to OSHA regulations and cleaning requirements, there are still many of these sinks in use. A weekly drain cleaner is recommended as is a thorough cleaning with an approved bowl cleaner after each case. Remember to always use a cover with a maximum 3-inch opening for the table hose with any open sink draining system. The cover should be cleaned after each procedure and

stored in a manner that prevents damage.

The second common waste removal system is a flushing china basin, usually similar to a urinal toilet fixture. While flushing china basins also have OSHA regulations and cleaning requirements similar to open sink bowls, they generally do a better job of reducing contaminated airborne particulate matter than open sink bowls, provided an approved cover is in place. A thorough scrubbing with an approved cleaner after each case is essential to keep the china material clean and sanitary. The cover should be cleaned after each procedure and carefully stored.


The third waste-removal system on the market is a continuous-rinsing rim receptor made of stainless steel and having a single 3-inch opening for the table hose. These stainless systems have excellent OSHA compliance and low maintenance needs. A flushing of the P-trap after each procedure is recommended as is a weekly drain cleaner application. The device uses a large strainer to catch table debris and should be stored in a disinfectant solution between cases.

Regardless of your room's waste removal system, we recommend that as a part of your complete facility maintenance plan you have a regularly scheduled main building sanitary sewer line cleaning performed by a licensed professional once a year or as otherwise recommended by the provider.

Regulatory Responsibilities for Walls, Floors and Ceilings

Most states have regulatory standards for walls, floors, ceilings and other porous materials. Common to all is the requirement that these elements be kept and maintained in a sanitary condition.

Please refer to your state's statutes for specific guidelines, as the funeral director can be held liable for failure to regularly inspect and ensure sanitary conditions in the establishment.




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Floors and Walls

Floors and walls can harbor colonies of microscopic contaminants and should be cleaned with disinfectant after each day's work. Pay special attention to nooks and crevices and to every grout joint if your room has tile covering on the wall or floor. Today's modern prep rooms often utilize medical-type flooring with a seamless base, thereby eliminating most all nooks and crevices while providing a microbial-resistant finish and overall ease of cleaning.

Modern wall surfaces include applications of high-scrub antimicrobial wall paints or continuous sheets of vinyl or rigid wall coverings. Both these modern wall material approaches result in a quick and easy daily wipe-up and assured compliance to state regulations.

Light Fixtures and Ceilings

Exposed light bulbs can become covered with grease and particles that not only harbor contaminants but also reduce light transmission when heavily soiled. Always make sure bulbs are cool before wiping the bulb surface or replacing bulbs. If you have covered fixtures, clean the lens surfaces quarterly.

Many states specifically require that the ceiling of the prep room be composed of a washable surface. Washable vinyl ceiling tiles or properly finished gypsum board ceilings both comply with this requirement.

We recommend mopping the ceiling twice yearly with a strong cleaner. Eye protection is strongly suggested because drips and fumes from cleaners containing bleach could harm the eyes.

Cabinets

Finally, keep your cabinets and countertops in top shape with daily cleaning. Many states specifically advise that the room must be cleaned after each and every procedure. Heed the manufacturer's recommendations to avoid damaging the finish. Wipe

up heavy spills right away. Consider placing protective drip-catching devices under heavy-use equipment such as embalming machines, where dyes may easily spill.

Older wood cabinets may be cited by inspectors for absorbing contaminants, particularly if the face surfaces have been damaged. The issue regarding wood cabinets is that they violate the nonporous material requirement found in most state regulations.

Older laminated plastic tops can suffer water damage and delaminating. Should delamination occur, you will need to replace tops as you will not be able to prevent bacteria from growing underneath the surface.

Proper Upkeep

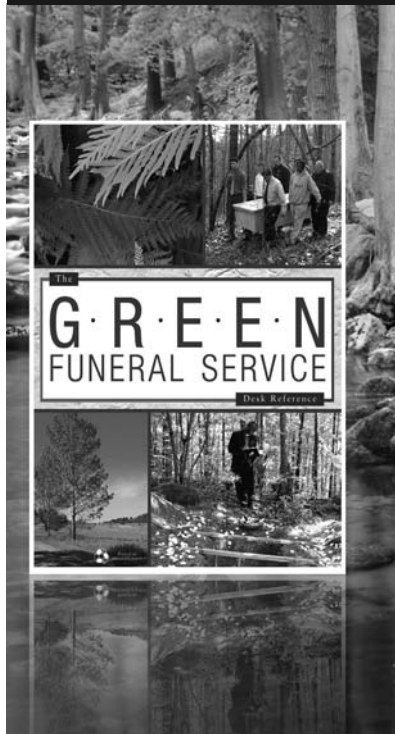
You may have a piece of equipment that befuddles your maintenance person. Mechanical maintenance often requires skills not

generally present in the average janitorial staff. A professional maintenance company may be your best bet for many of the tasks mentioned in this article. So, while our guide is meant as a useful tool, always contact your supplier or seek other professional assistance should you encounter a problem.

On the other hand, normal house-keeping skills will keep you in state compliance and preserve the appearance and life expectancy of your cabinets, floors and walls. These areas can be kept in good condition by the staff that attends your funeral home.

All in all, funeral homes that develop and execute a maintenance plan for their preparation room will find that "a stitch in time saves nine" along with "an ounce of prevention" will result in longer product lives, lower operating costs, greater OSHA compliance and a clean, safe and comfortable working environment for the embalmer and staff. ❖

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