



DRY CLEANING DATA

There is no real mystery about dry cleaning. While something of a misnomer, dry cleaning is simply the use of chemical fluids to remove soils and stains from fabric. It is called "dry cleaning" because the fluids contain little or no water and do not penetrate the fibers as water does.

Dry cleaning fluids actually dissolve grease and oil and remove them from the garment. This cannot be accomplished by water alone. Natural fibers, such as wools and silks, can shrink, distort, and lose color when washed in water, but will dry clean beautifully. Synthetic fibers, such as polyester, also respond well to dry cleaning. These fibers can retain oily stains after washing, but dry cleaning will remove them.

A dry cleaning machine looks like a very large front-loading home washer. It uses similar mechanical action to loosen embedded dirt. At the same time, the solvent is filtered continuously to ensure its clarity.

Technology today permits dry cleaners to clean clothes in an environmentally safe manner. Cleaning fluids and vapors are contained inside the cleaning machines.

HISTORY

There are many stories about the origin of dry cleaning. Presumably, dry cleaning was discovered when a petroleum-type fluid accidentally spilled on a greasy fabric. It quickly evaporated and miraculously removed the stains. The firm of Jolly Belin, which operated in Paris in the 1940s, is credited as the first dry cleaning plant. In the early days, "garment scourers and dyers" found several fluids that could be used as dry cleaning solvent, including camphene, benzene, kerosene, and gasoline.

These solvents are dangerously flammable, so dry cleaning was a hazardous business until the 1926 introduction of Stoddard solvent, the first petroleum solvent produced specifically for dry cleaning. This solvent does not ignite readily and has the added advantage of being free of odor and impurities.

Perchloroethylene (per-chlor-o-ethyl-ene), a non-flammable fluid, was introduced in the 1930s and is used today in a great majority of dry cleaning plants. In the 1960s, fluorocarbon solvent was introduced for cleaning. However, it is now nearly phased out due to suggested ozone depletion. Few such solvents are used today.

CLEANERS CANNOT

1. Remove some stains. The nature and age of the stain and the fabric's color and construction sometimes make stains impossible to remove without damaging the garment.
2. Prevent some colors from bleeding or fading. If the manufacturer does not thoroughly test the dyes for colorfastness in both solvent and water, some color may be lost during dry cleaning or stain removal.

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3. Prevent excessive shrinkage in dry cleaning. When fabrics shrink in controlled dry cleaning systems, it is because the manufacturer failed to adequately preshrink all component parts before the garment was constructed.
4. Reverse worn or torn areas caused by wear. In some cases, small rips or holes can be rewoven, but this type of damage is the consumer's responsibility.
5. Prevent or correct holes caused by insects or acid spillage. Such holes may not appear before dry cleaning, but they result from a previous weakening of the fibers.
6. Correct obvious shine. Shine on fabrics is caused by excessive heat and pressure used in home pressing.
7. Correct the results of poor home spot removal. Home procedures, such as excessive rubbing of delicate fabrics or failure to rinse spotting chemicals from the fabric, can cause permanent damage.

MORE THAN JUST CLEANING

Professional dry cleaning is much more than just cleaning. It is many different operations, all performed by skilled people with the goal of giving your garments that "like new" appearance. Their procedures include:

1. Checking the labels for adequate care instructions and fiber content.
2. Removing spots and stains with water or special spotting agents.
3. Classifying garments according to fabric type, color, and degree of soiling.
4. Replacing sizing, water repellency, and other finishes when necessary.
5. Pressing the garment on steam equipment to restore its original shape and appearance.
6. Replacing missing buttons and performing minor repairs whenever possible.
7. Packaging the garment neatly in a protective wrapping.

Along with these basic procedures, many professional cleaners offer additional services, such as garment storage, cleaning of furs and leathers, rug cleaning, drapery cleaning, smoke removal, pillow cleaning, shirt laundering, wedding gown preservation, and alterations and repairs.



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TIPS TO HELP YOU GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR DRY CLEANING DOLLAR

1. Have your garments cleaned when soiled. Stains and soil left too long are sometimes impossible to remove and will shorten the wear life of the garment.
2. Discuss any stains with your dry cleaner. Be especially sure to point out light-colored or invisible spills, such as those from soft drinks, wine, and other alcoholic beverages. These stains contain sugar which can caramelize and turn brown with the heat of drying unless flushed out with water before cleaning.
3. Take the garment in for professional care as soon as possible after staining occurs (preferably within a week).
4. Avoid fabric contact with solutions containing alcohol, such as perfumes and lotions. Alcohol can affect some dyes.
5. Allow deodorants and antiperspirants to dry before you dress.
6. Protect your garments, especially silks, from excessive perspiration. Perspiration can weaken silk fibers.
7. Protect your garments from prolonged exposure to direct sunlight or strong artificial light.
8. Do not iron or press stained or soiled clothes. The heat may set the stain.

Source of information: International Fabricare Institute, 12251 Tech Road,
Silver Spring, MD 20904, 1-800-638-2627.