



Stay on Your Feet (If You Can)

by Rick Meehan

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It sounds great to tell a customer that you'll be glad to have your cleaning crew handle overhead work, but is it really a good idea? Not without the right equipment it's not! Overhead work requires excellent liability and health insurance, and that's a fact. Step stools, ladders, boxes, crates, chairs, tables, desks – all are likely candidates for helping a crewmember to reach a high spot – and just as likely to put them out of work indefinitely if they fall. Purchase the right tools for the overhead job. It is always better to stand on your own two feet than to dangle from a ladder or perch on an object while trying to get something clean.

There are many different brands and styles of equipment designed to make overhead cleaning easier. Pressure washing systems we are all familiar with. They squirt volumes of water and detergent under high pressure; however, pressure washing is rarely able to be used inside a building. So, are we back to square one? Nowhere close; there are many tools available to keep cleaning personnel grounded.

Before we hit the tool manifest, let's remember that most overhead work involves cleanup of dust, oils, and bugs. Dust, bugs, yeah – but oils? Absolutely! If nothing else, we humans cover every surface in a room with body oil over a period of time. Just the act of opening a door to the outside brings in petroleum-based oils from motor vehicles, both from tracking via feet and wafting on the air. High places require

extra cleaning efforts, thus high places rarely get cleaning attention. Grime builds up on the tops of cabinetry, window sills, door jams, ductwork, pipes, walls, and especially in high corners.

Another aspect of overhead cleaning is the cost in terms of labor hours. A cleaning contractor must include extra time in the quotation if a client needs overhead work. Too, able-bodied cleaning professionals make the job go faster. Since time is money in the cleaning industry, be extremely careful putting out quotes for overhead work or you will get burned. As a supplier of janitorial products for the last 32 years, believe me, I've heard all the tales of woe. You don't want to sink your ship under the weight of underbids, lost work time, workman's compensation claims, and liability issues from damages to a client's property while your people were on the premises.

If you've covered the bases, then here's a list of standard tools that indoor overhead cleaning requires:

Extendable Dusters



Brushes that Fit in High Corners



Extension handles for brushes



Dusters that Fit on Long Handles



Arm extender gripper tools



Microfiber cleaning tools designed for walls, floors, and ceilings



Dry cleaning chemical sponges



Large cellulose sponges



Microfiber clothes or cotton rags



Claw-type mop handle for gripping sponges and rags



Universal pad holders to go with extension handles



Bendable microfiber dusters that fit on extension handles



Backpack vacuum cleaners with extension tools

Fatigue is a big issue for cleaning folks working overhead. Proper tools and cleaning chemicals reduce labor. Anything that you can

do to make the work easier, even if it costs more to get the proper equipment and hire people able to handle the task, is better than getting someone hurt, maimed, or even killed. I once had a customer that fell off a rickety old ladder while scrubbing brick. He fell only 10 feet – to his death. Don't let this happen to you or your staff.



Speaking of falls, if you absolutely must have cleaning folks on stools and ladders, buy only the best professional models. These products have built-in safety features to reduce risk. Never let your people use the height-boosters at hand like a client's furniture. Always, always, always use your own approved equipment! Train your staff to make sure they utilize those safety features too.

While overhead cleaning is a profitable add-on service, spend the money for the best equipment, the sturdier personnel, good insurance, and don't try to rush the job. The old adage, "It's better to be safe than sorry," should be your policy. Only then can you confidently tell your clients that you'll be glad to get rid of the unsightly spider webs and other high-jinx that plagues the world of overhead cleaning!



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