

Next time you need your carpet cleaned, you'll be glad you saved this!

Consumer Guide To Carpet Cleaning

Featuring An Exclusive Interview With "The King of Clean"

By Sandy Carpet

- ✓ **How does your carpet cleaner measure up to these standards? (They might not rate as high as you would think.)**
- ✓ **Will your rental or home cleaning machine really compare with a professional?**
- ✓ **"How to Find A Top Quality Professional Cleaner," made simple.**
- ✓ **"Okay, so I ignore my carpet. What's the worst thing that could happen?"**
- ✓ **Why would I want to clean my carpets anyway?**

While most people clean carpets for appearance reasons, there are far better reasons to keep your carpet clean regularly. Your family's health could be at risk, causing lifelong allergies, and ruining a valuable investment to name a few.

For over a decade, a quiet revolution has been slowly changing the way we look at cleaning. Nowhere have changes been as dramatic as the carpet cleaning industry. But are Orange Counties carpet cleaning professionals giving us the benefits of the most modern scientific advances in the carpet cleaning industry?

Mom Didn't Know Best

The first cleaning methods for wall to wall carpets, like shampoos and foams, left heavy residues which caused dirt to cling to the carpet. The more you cleaned your carpet, the faster it got dirty. That's why our parents used to only clean carpets when they got to be intolerable.

New Technology Beters Our Lives

But times have changed. New "Minimal Residue" cleaning techniques & scientifically formulated, specialized cleaning agents have eliminated the sticky residue problem.

Standardized cleaning processes among cleaning professionals assure that you will get a clean carpet that stays clean.

New technology insures that frequent cleaning won't damage your carpet. In fact, the right cleaning method will actually restore and prolong its life.

Recent findings from studies by the Environmental Protection Agency prove that carpet can protect your health if maintained properly. They also show that neglected carpets can cause lifelong health problems. We now know it's no longer okay to let your carpets go.

Not All Cleaning is Created Equal

Will all cleaning machines restore life and healthfulness to your carpet? Not really. All remove at least some dirt. But there is a great variance from one machine to the next as far as how much dirt they remove.

Plus, some machines extract dirt while others just smear it around. Some machines kill germs and dust mites and wash out their dead bodies and feces while others do little or nothing. Many machines still for sale or rent leave heavy residues.

To top it off, many professional cleaners are not all that current with modern technology either. It is possible to import dangerous cleaning agents from out of state that are illegal in California, containing certain types of butyl or phosphates. To save money, a professional cleaner could also choose to use cleaning

agents, like Tide, not formulated for the type of cleaning you want to achieve on a carpet.

Many Orange County professional cleaners have no formal training or education for carpet cleaning, and many don't even know what the Carpet Cleaning Standards are as set forth by the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification (www.IICRC.org - the self regulating training body of the carpet cleaning industry). In fact, many professionals besides not being skilled, are not even insured, licensed or bonded. Meaning, if you have a problem with them, you have little recourse.

How To Choose A Cleaner

The good news is you have lots of options and Orange County has some of the best cleaners in the nation. One of them is a certified "Master Cleaner" who is also the past President of the largest, regional trade association for cleaners in the nation. They call him "The King of Clean" and his name is Eric Bollmann, owner of Haines & Cross.

Here is what "The King of Clean" has to tell you about choosing a cleaner. Your first choice is whether you are going to rent or buy a machine, or hire a professional. Obviously, renting is the cheapest way to go, and you'll feel you did a good job with

it because your body aches and you pulled out buckets and buckets of dirty water. But home cleaning machines have lots of limitations.

First, anything that plugs into a wall is limited by the circuit breaker as to how powerful it can be. Electric circuit breakers just aren't capable of producing a vacuum strong enough to pull the column of water out of a carpet which I have found is required in order to flush sandy soils out of the base of the carpet. In other words, they are underpowered and don't clean worth beans.

Second, it takes temperatures in excess of 130 degrees to kill dust mites, germs and bacteria. By the time the water contacts the carpet, it is probably less than 100 degrees, so there is little sanitizing going on.

Third, I feel most do-it-yourself units use high residue cleaning agents that just aren't up to current cleaning technology. Every day consumers call us with foamy dirt attracting residues left in their carpets from these machines.

Lastly, there is a dangerous mildew that grows on some carpet backings if they are cleaned improperly; it could result in a health risk. Non-professional cleaning greatly increases this risk.

You can get some of the surface dirt out with most do-it-yourself methods, but none of them compare to a thorough professional setup. So I would say they are only good for spotting up the carpet, not for serious cleaning. If any of them were that good I wouldn't be spending \$55,000.00 to set up a truck mounted cleaning machine.

SC: "Will A Professional Really Clean My Carpet Better Than I Would?"

K of C: "Not all of them will clean well. Many carpet cleaning professionals stumbled into the carpet cleaning business. For a thousand dollars you can buy your own Mickey Mouse cleaning machine and 'zap' you are a professional. They don't know any more about cleaning your carpet than anyone off the street, and they probably don't care as much as you either. You can do a better job yourself with a rental machine than some quasi-

professional.

But a knowledgeable, skilled, concerned, professional with top-of-the-line equipment and cleaning agents...There's no way you can compare to them."

SC: "How Can You Tell a Good Professional From a Bad One?"

K of C: "First of all, let me clear up the 'good and bad' thing. There probably isn't a 'bad' carpet cleaner in this whole County. Carpet cleaners tend to be hard working, personable, honest people trying to provide for their family. If that is 'bad', then I'm all for it. What you're really asking is, 'How can I choose a company that is going to do a good job for me?'"

First off, price is a dead giveaway. Quasi-professional carpet cleaners feel inside that they can't compete straight up with true professionals, so they hope to lure consumers with a slightly lower price, usually about five cents per square foot lower than average. Sometimes they go for a ridiculously lower price like \$14.95 per room.

Now...you couldn't pay yourself to clean a carpet for \$14.95, let alone pay for the cleaning agents, equipment, gasoline and travel time. So, if you couldn't do it yourself, how could you pay a professional?

When you see ads like that, one of two things is going on...1. The poor carpet cleaner has no idea what he is doing and is hoping that if he can clean enough carpets at that price that somehow he can make a living (of course it won't work because he is cleaning below his cost and every time he cleans a carpet at that price he ends up a little deeper in debt), or 2. The guy is a pushy salesman and the low price is just to get him in the door so he can hit you up for the real costs. Either way you will end up frustrated, having paid for a lousy job.

So what good is it going to do you to save five cents or more per square foot on carpet cleaning when you know you are not getting what you paid for? You don't save money if you pay for something you don't get! Steer away from the bargain basement cleaners, they can only cut cost by using cheap equipment, cheap

personnel, and cheap cleaning agents, and that won't get it clean.

Next is cleaning method. Lots of companies claim to have a patented or exclusive cleaning method. That is gimmick advertising. The truth is that in this industry, when someone invents a better way to clean, they sell it to everybody who will buy it. That way they do the most good and make the most money. You make more money selling chemicals and equipment than you do cleaning carpets, so no one with a truly good cleaning method would refuse to sell it more than one company per city. If a company is claiming that they have an exclusive process, the chances are that nobody else wants it...so watch out.

There is a variety of valid cleaning methods in use today, and I have used them all. When I started out working with Ultra-Dry in San Juan Capistrano we primarily used a bonnet cleaning system, then for true dry cleaning we introduced the Host method. Along the way we also have used a shampoo method in combination with a portable extractor. Then we upgraded to truck mounted cleaning systems. Over the years I've used them all side by side.

When you want thoroughness, and long lasting clean, I can tell you from years of experience, truck mounted steam cleaners are miles ahead of anything else. (But in all fairness, a great technician can do a good job with a lousy cleaning method, so the person is more important than the tools.)

However, there is a great disparity between truck mounted steam cleaners. Some are no better than a rental machine from the supermarket. The best machines will kill dust mites, germs and bacteria on contact, flush out buckets of sand that other cleaning methods would leave behind, make the carpet soft and plush, leave minimal residue, and cause flattened, unraveled yarns to snap back close to their original shape.

These machines will also get the carpet cleaner, quicker, so the owner doesn't have to charge you much more than if he bought a cheap piece of junk machine. Of course, this is all just my humble opinion. But my opinion is verified by the fact that you see

more and more steam cleaners and fewer alternative methods. Even the die hard Chem-dry franchises now have steam cleaners available to them.

Steam cleaning is currently the wave of the future. Even most of the carpet mills recommend steam cleaning in their carpet care literature. In fact, many warranties on carpet are void if you can't prove you have had your carpet steam cleaned every eighteen months.

In addition to a powerful truck mounted steam cleaner, I prefer a special tool called a rotary jet extractor. There are several types available, and they all are good at making sure you get the carpet cleaner, deeper.

So look for a truck mounted steam cleaner with rotary jet extraction. Beware of gimmick methods and lowest price cleaners. Look for someone with training and who has a vested interest in getting your carpet clean. I'm talking about a strong guarantee.

Take mine for example: 'You will feel my cleaning is the most thorough you have ever seen, or I will clean it again for free. If you are still not pleased for any reason, I will refund all your money. No spots will come back and your carpet will not re-soil rapidly. If you have any issues or concerns after the cleaning you call us. Even if it's several months after the original cleaning, we want to make sure you are completely happy with the job we did for you. 'With a powerful guarantee like that, the consumer can't lose. I know that I'm not getting paid unless my work is fantastic, so you better believe we are motivated to do the best job achievable today.

Many companies, even inferior ones, have guarantees. Others make claims that they are the best, or that their cleaning is the deepest or most thorough. But if they are really that good, let's see them give consumers clear control to decide if they feel it is the best or their money back. I'm throwing down the gauntlet...I hope you'll print this...If you own a cleaning company and you think you offer superior service, then I challenge you to give consumers a powerful guarantee that puts them in control. You'll find out real quick that there is a lot you can do better. Do that, and our entire industry will improve."

SC: "I have a four bedroom home, one dog and two children. How often should I clean my carpets?"

K of C: "There are a lot more variables than home size, and number or species of occupants. There is country or city, allergy victims, color and style of carpet, recent illnesses, and how much you live on the carpet. Then only you can determine what level of healthfulness you want your home to have, or what appearance level you want to maintain.

But here are some guidelines for you. The Environmental Protection Agency recommends about every year, not more than one and a half years, for health reasons. The manufacturers of most carpet recommend about the same to preserve the life of the carpet.

They will both tell you that it would be good to clean more often, you understand, these are bare minimums. They might be okay for the elderly, who hardly walk on their carpet, but not for a family like yours. You are going to have to clean at least once per year. But I have a better way to figure it out, and save you money at the same time.

Don't waste your money cleaning your whole house all the time. Get it all cleaned up at once, and then keep it cleaned with frequent cleaning for the most used areas. In your case, you might have me clean the staircase, halls, and family room about every four or six months, and since the dirt will get tracked off on them, it will take a year and a half for it to get back to the bedrooms. Have the worse areas cleaned frequently, as soon as traffic lanes start to appear, and do the whole place when the bedroom start to look slightly soiled. You'll keep your bill down, your carpet will look good all the time, it will last longer, and you will maximize your health benefits."

SC: "What health benefit are you talking about?"

K of C: "The EPA did an amazing study and they found out that your carpet is like a giant air filter. It can be more healthful than hardwood floor if maintained properly, because it traps the pollutants in the air.

You would be disgusted with how much gunk there is even in the beautiful Orange County air. It's full of pollen, carcinogens, car exhaust, mold and mildew spores, cat dander, dust mite feces and germs.

It wasn't so bad in the drafty house I grew up in, but in today's homes all that gunk gets trapped in your home. The good thing with carpet is that it will filter the dust and pollutants out of the air and actually contain it where you don't have to breathe it over and over. Hardwood, stone and tile floors can't do that. Carpets are our heroes, but they've got a bit of a problem.

You see, a carpet can only hold so much air pollution. I mean, they get up to 40 million germs in six months, plus millions of bacteria. They get billions of piles of dust mites feces in that same amount of time. Anyway, the carpet can only take so much of this before it starts to escape back into the air again.

It also now appears that lifelong allergies and chemical activity could be caused by over-exposure to these pollutants when we were children.

If you get your carpet cleaned frequently, especially after an illness, field burning, or high pollen count days, you could prevent exposure to harmful germs, chemicals and allergens which your carpet traps for you. Our parent didn't know this, and a lot of health problems that we have today might have been avoidable. We could save our children from a severe illness or lifelong allergies, by keeping the carpet clean."

SC: "It sounds like it would be better to have hardwood floors."

K of C: "Nope. The most recent EPA study I know of showed that hard surfaces are inferior for two reasons. First, they can't trap dust like a carpet does, so hard surfaces are not as healthful as a properly maintained carpet. Second, when you calculate labor, hard surfaces cost more to maintain than carpet. Besides, carpets make you feel all comfy and fuzzy. Who wants hard, cold, noisy floors? Usually, they wind up putting oriental rugs over them to compensate for the undesirability of hard floors and those rugs are an additional cost to clean."

SC: "Forget all the indoor air nonsense, what's the worst thing that could happen if I neglect my carpet?"

K of C: "I'm telling you, it's not nonsense! This is a plague we are facing because of the way we have built our homes and dumped garbage into our air. If you don't believe me, read Dr. Berry's book 'The Indoor Built Environment'. He's the EPA scientist that headed up all these studies I'm talking about.

You don't get it. You are like the skeptics in the mid-1800s who didn't believe that illnesses were caused by germs. Now we see that the discovery of germs has led to a cleaning revolution. We would be shocked at the way people lived back then. It was disgusting, but they didn't know better. I'm telling you, there's a quiet cleaning revolution going on now that is going to change our concept of household cleanliness. You can either benefit from it, or suffer. It's your choice as to the level of healthfulness you want your home to have.

Here are some facts. Over two million dust mites infest your home. They excrete 40 million piles of feces every day, which get into your mouth and lungs. Forty pounds of dust compiles in your home per year, containing 1.6 billion germs and bacteria. It's enough to make you sick.

If you follow my advice for carpet cleaning, wipe down all hard surfaces, knobs, and handles with disinfectant cleaning solution and use a disinfecting dish soap with hot water or a dishwasher, and make everyone wash their hands frequently throughout the day with disinfectant soap, and lastly, cook chicken thoroughly, you will cut your yearly illnesses to less than half. Whew! Sorry for the tirade, but this is important stuff to know that I was never taught in school."

SC: "Wow!"

K of C: "To answer your question, 'what's the worst thing that could happen...besides health,' you need to consider the appearance and longevity of the carpet. If you don't clean it regularly, it will wear out about twice as fast. Any soil that your vacuum can't pick up will grind your precious yarns down into worthless

fibers quick.

Our acid soil also etches your carpet fibers and makes them look dull in the traffic lanes. Most carpets are replaced because they uglier out before they wore out. This etching causes a dull gray appearance that can't be remedied. Similarly, oily soils form resins on the carpet which permanently discolor it.

Plus, you'll be continually embarrassed when visitors pop by. They always act like they don't notice, but **60% of your guests' first impression is formed around the carpet.** A neglected carpet can give a wrong impression of you.

I feel that most importantly, it will lower your sense of self-esteem and personal well being. Home is supposed to be a nice relaxing place to come to at the end of the day. **Dirty carpets are depressing,** and that can affect everything in your life. So don't neglect your carpets, it will affect your life profoundly."

SC: "Okay! You sure are passionate about cleaning...Now I see why you're the King of Clean. What is the simplest way to find a great cleaner?"

K of C: "Unfortunately, like I was explaining earlier, it's not an easy, clear-cut decision. Okay, I'll tell you what. **You want a simple way to choose a cleaner? Call me.** That's all you have to do.

Sure, there are some great cleaners out there. But I'll wager the cost of cleaning your carpet that no one will do a better job for you than I will.

And my prices are reasonable too. In fact, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll clean the carpet of each of your readers for free, just to prove what I'm saying. Here is an irresistible offer for you. If you are a homeowner who has never before tried my services, I will clean one room of carpet up to 125 square feet for you for free. Just tell us that you read this article."

SC: "Wow! You can't do that, You'll go broke!"

"You're right. Forget I said that... No, wait!

If you will promise that when you see

what a great job we do, you will let me do any other cleaning you may need done right then and there, and recommend me when you see what a great job we did, I'll do it. Plus, if you want to have a lot of cleaning done, I'll let you choose between the free room or my best current special, whichever saves you the most.

SC: "Thanks, Mr. Bollmann."

K of C: "You bet. Thanks for the interview"

Eric Bollmann is the Owner of Haines & Cross Carpet, Rug & Upholstery Cleaning, located in Laguna Niguel, CA. Mr. Bollmann has been a professional cleaner since 1997 and is certified by the IICRC. He's a past President of the Carpet & FabriCare Institute and resides with his wife and three children in San Juan Capistrano.

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