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Higher Ground for Healthcare

Healthcare laundries pursue accreditation for quality/safety standards
By Ruth Schapiro

Today's healthcare laundry operators want to show their customers that they maintain high standards of quality, safety, reliability and service. One way they can do that is by pursuing accreditation through the Healthcare Laundry Accreditation Council (HLAC).

Over the past nine months, more than 40 companies have lined up to attain HLAC accreditation. The HLAC is an independent nonprofit organization—created with support from TRSA and others—it's the industry's first organization specifically designed to offer companies an inspection and accreditation process that formally recognizes healthcare laundries that meet high standards.

Faultless testimonial

So far, 11 companies have received accreditation and more than 30 are in the process of doing so. A large number of these companies signed up for HLAC accreditation following a presentation given during last November's TRSA Healthcare Seminar in Las Vegas.

One company that's received HLAC accreditation is Faultless Healthcare Services in Kansas City, MO. "We chose accreditation for two reasons," says Faultless President and CEO Susan Witcher. "We believe accreditation provides a market advantage and, most important, accreditation confirms that we are doing things the right way."

Accreditation by the HLAC means that the company has passed an inspection of its facility, policies and procedures, training programs and its relationships with healthcare customers. Witcher said accreditation has produced multiple benefits.

"At Faultless, we are always looking for ways to improve what we're doing," says Witcher, who also serves on TRSA's Board of Directors. "There were several things included in the accreditation process that have helped make us a better company. Because the process was so all encompassing, everyone became involved in preparing for the inspection. When we passed, it was a great morale boost for our employees and management team."

Exactng requirements

The HLAC's independent inspection and accrediting program is raising the bar for healthcare laundry operations—on-premise, co-op and commercial.

The HLAC has a 12-member volunteer Board of Directors. This group was carefully selected in July 2005 to represent all facets of the healthcare textile industry, including operating companies, customers and government organizations focused on healthcare.

The HLAC's fee-based inspection process costs \$5,000 per plant, with \$1,000 due on registration. The balance is due before the inspection date. Multiple plants owned by the same company receive a \$1,200 discount per plant. Payment covers the costs for pre-inspection materials, the inspection itself (one day), the formal inspection report and all necessary follow-up efforts after the inspection. The inspector's fee and travel expenses are included in the HLAC fee. Accreditation lasts for three years.

Wave of the future

While still a relative newcomer, the HLAC is sparking a revolution in healthcare laundering. Laundries that receive accreditation have demonstrated that they meet or exceed the highest standards for processing healthcare textiles. Their customers can expect quality, consistency and a steady delivery of clean textiles from accredited healthcare launderers. In time, it's likely that healthcare providers will begin requiring that any laundry that does business with them must have accredited facilities. After all, most hospitals already accredit their institutions with various public and private agencies in order to serve patients.

The question facing healthcare laundries then is not whether, but when you'll begin the process of accrediting your plants. For more on HLAC and the benefits of accreditation, check their Web site at www.hlacnet.org. TR

Ruth Schapiro is a freelance writer based in Alexandria, VA. She is also a former associate editor of Textile Rental.

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